

CÆSAR

AND

CLEOPATRA

KHALIL SAADEH

Victoria R.I.

COLLECTION
OF VICTORIAN BOOKS

AT
BRIGHAM YOUNG
UNIVERSITY

Victorian
892.73
K526c
1898



BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY



3 1197 22894 2709

651 E. 1st



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2015

<https://archive.org/details/caesarleopatrah00khal>



CÆSAR AND CLEOPATRA.

CÆSAR & CLEOPATRA

AN

HISTORICAL ROMANCE

BY

KHALIL SAADEH, M.D.

LONDON :

EDWIN VAUGHAN & CO.,

11 AND 13, ST. BRIDE STREET, E.C.

1898.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

TO
MY DEARLY BELOVED
WIFE
THIS BOOK IS
INSCRIBED.



PREFACE.

PERFECTION in this world is impossible to attain. Like the mirage of the Sahara, it may look not very far off, but, like the same phenomenon, it always eludes your grasp. There never existed a genius who could not have been a better one, nor a hero who could not have been a more perfect one. But, in the domain of romance, it is neither advisable nor wise to clothe a hero with the robe of perfection. Such heroes become too exalted to have anything in common with ourselves. We do not want heroes whom the passions and storms of life pass by without in the least affecting them. We prefer heroes of our own passions, of our own natures, and of our own weaknesses. We can understand and sympathise with them. Perfect heroes are only the product of imagination; they are out of touch with our human imperfections.

In the following historical romance there has been no effort to present a perfect hero. The author has chosen his characters as they were delineated by the hand of history. It was said by a well-known writer that the dramas of

Shakespeare had a powerful grasp on the human mind because he represented them to the world as they were handed down to him. Of course, we all know that he now and then improved on facts, and in startling fashion, and every novelist and dramatist is, more or less, bound to do the same.

Yet the most skilful plot-weaver is a mere bungler when his efforts are compared with human realities. The life of every human creature, be he a prince or a beggar, is full of romantic incidents. If a flood of light were shed on many crooked ways and lives, they would outdo the most startling fictitious characters.

I venture to presume that the incidents in the following pages will make an impression on the mind, because the characters therein are real human beings, who lived and moved and had their being on this little planet of ours like ourselves; and whose passions and actions are in accordance with what we know of human life. They are on the whole *historical truths*; and *truth* is, indeed, *stranger* than *fiction*!

With regard to these historical truths one or two words on Cæsar's passion for Cleopatra and their subsequent intimacy may be deemed necessary. It is impossible within the small space at my disposal to enter into anything like a discussion with regard to some disputed historical facts. Suffice it to say that there is overwhelming evidence of Cæsar's passion for the Egyptian Queen after the memorable battle of Pharsalia, and of his landing in Alexandria in pursuit of his unhappy rival. Indeed, there are those who affirm that his landing in Alexandria was for no other reason than to satisfy his curiosity to see the charms of the renowned Queen, who was often mentioned before him as a rare beauty. I am not inclined to take

this exaggerated view of things, but I believe, with one of his biographers, that Cæsar's delay after his arrival and the later delay of three months after the final settlement of Egypt, taken together with the known beauty and ability of Cleopatra and the birth of a son named Cæsarion, make the inference almost irresistible (1).

No matter what the historical sceptics may say to the contrary, the truth is that Cæsar fell passionately in love with Cleopatra, and there is enough evidence to show that a marriage alliance was entertained by both parties, and some write as if it had formally taken place.

In any case, there is overwhelming evidence that Cleopatra joined Cæsar at Rome after his triumphant return from the terrible battle of Munda, and that she was living with him in his house at the time of his murder. That it was so believed a hundred years after his death is, of course, indisputable. We are further informed, by another writer, that the Queen of Egypt, with her infant son Cæsarion, was at the time of Cæsar's murder living with him in his villa on the further side of the Tiber; and that on Cæsar's death her first wish was to get the child acknowledged by the Roman Senate as her colleague on the throne, and that she applied for help to Cicero, who was alarmed at hearing that she was soon to give birth to another child, as he did not want to have more Cæsars. On being refused help, she thought herself unsafe in Rome, and she fled privately (2). Cicero, who was not a great friend either to Cæsar or Cleopatra, except as it suited him to flatter them, does not seem to have regretted her flight,

(1) "Julius Cæsar," by Warde Fowler, p. 311.

(2) "History of Egypt," by Samuel Sharpe, vol. ii., p. 50.

for he writes to his dear Atticus—"I am not sorry to hear of the flight of the Queen." (3).

There could be little doubt that Cleopatra's presence in Rome, with what was known of her ambitions and aspirations, could not but aggravate the danger which threatened Cæsar's life, and hastened the conspiracy which ended in such disastrous results on the memorable Ides of March. Philip Smith alludes to this fact in his chapter dealing with the "Great Civil War." "The nobles," he says, "who had been used to the dignified freedom of intercourse with magistrates who were still their equals, felt the difficulty of access to the dictator (Cæsar) as an intolerable humiliation; and a state already regal was invested with the hateful complexion of an Oriental despotism, when Cleopatra came to Rome at Cæsar's invitation, and her child, Cæsarion, was openly recognised as his offspring." (4). The immense influence she had on Cæsar, and consequently on political affairs, may be judged from the fact that notwithstanding the hateful complexion of Oriental despotism as above alluded to, the nobles repaired to her Court beyond the walls of Rome to pay their homage to the haughty and bewitching Egyptian. Cicero, who subsequently applauded the murder of Cæsar on the Ides of March, did not blush to include himself among her flatterers.

Much nonsense has been written on Cæsar's criminal aspirations and the patriotic motives of his assassins. History has clothed their shameful crime with a white robe of false morality. Every student of Roman History must admit that the Senate was, at this period we are dealing with, a

(3) "Reginæ fuga mihi non molesta." To Atticus, xiv., 8.

(4) "Ancient History," vol. iii., p. 253.

corrupt body, composed chiefly of brazen-faced members who embezzled the money of the State, sold her interests to barbarian kings and princes, connived at the work of injustice and violence, and brought the Roman name to shame and disgrace. The wonder is they should have lasted so long. If there had been no Julius Cæsar to aim at rectifying these evils and to uphold the martial spirit of the army—the only element in Rome which yet respected discipline and order—the fall of the mistress of the world might have taken place then and there. That he was ambitious there can be little doubt. Few of us would respect a character in which that great stimulus to human greatness was extinct. But it must always be remembered that Julius Cæsar was the *one and only* man in Rome who, in his Herculean palm, could grasp that overgrown monster of a turbulent city, and compel her to respect law and order. All the seditious senators of Rome who thundered at him from a distance, looked like so many impotent boys shaking their fists at a great giant; and when the giant made his appearance both thunder and fists disappeared, and nothing was seen but a crowd of flatterers who drew from the great man a smile of contempt as their threats had previously elicited a look of disdain.

That the murderers acted from motives of jealousy could scarcely be doubted. Most of them belonged to the Pompeian faction, and instead of being executed, as certainly would have been the case if a Marius or a Sylla had been in the place of Cæsar, they were pardoned and loaded with honour. The mean spirit of Cassius, who was perhaps the instigator of the whole plot, looked upon every fresh favour from Cæsar as a new insult. He was buried under Cæsar's magnanimity, and he meant to discharge his debt of obligation

with a single thrust of his sword. That the man (5) who was mentioned in Cæsar's will to be one of his chief heirs should have been the very man who treacherously allured him to his fate, is one of those rare instances in which the wickedness and vileness of human nature stand appallingly to the view.

Marcus Brutus was the only conspirator whom we are led to believe acted according to the dictate of conscience and patriotism. But even this, if true, cannot atone for a crime of this magnitude. Pardoned by Cæsar after the battle of Pharsalia and honoured with unbounded confidence, gratitude ought to have bound him to the man who spared his life, ennobled his rank, and dearly loved him as a tender father. We can well imagine the astonishment and horror of Cæsar when this traitor rushed at him with his brandished dagger.

The murder of Julius Cæsar was one of the most pathetic scenes in the history of the world. It was the meanest, the basest, and the most cowardly crime ever committed against a ruler. It is a subject for wonder that Shakespeare should have abused his poetical gifts to ennoble treachery and assassination. He wrote as if there was still a Republic. He seems to have forgotten that nothing remained of that lioness except the *skin*. The honesty, valour, and greatness of the old Republic had been things of the past. Like all organic beings, she lived, grew, degenerated, and was now in her death throes. Nothing in the world could have saved such a constitution, not even the murder of the great Cæsar. Goethe's conception of this crime is a much nobler and more correct one than that of Shakespeare. He called it

“the most senseless of all deeds,” and the most senseless of all deeds it certainly was. Furthermore, the crime was absurd, for in aiming at murdering Monarchy, they murdered the ablest and best monarch they could have ever had, and left Monarchy intact.

To murder a great ruler like Cæsar without having previously taken the necessary steps for the future government of the State was in itself a crime of the highest magnitude, even if Cæsar deserved to be murdered. The criminal rashness of his assassins plunged their country into a useless and disastrous civil war. This alone discloses the kind of patriots they were. Their patriotism, if they had any, was of that impulsive sentimental kind which might make a beautiful picture on the brain of Shakespeare, but which was spurned with contempt by the solid judgment of a philosopher like Goethe.

Cæsar's moral errors are great ; I do not try to detract from them. Indeed, I am afraid we heap upon his head more than he committed. But, in spite of his faults and errors, he stands towering above his age like a living monument of human greatness and magnanimity. As long as this planet turns upon her axis the name of Julius Cæsar will be handed down from generation to generation as the greatest genius that Rome ever produced.

K. S.

Shweir, Mount Lebanon, February 19th, 1895.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER.	PAGE
I. VENUS IN TROUBLE	I
II. ROMAN POLITICS	10
III. ON THE BANKS OF THE RUBICON	20
IV. THE HORSEMAN	26
V. A PHILOSOPHER AND HIS DUTY	34
VI. THE OLD MAN'S MESSAGE	41
VII. THE FRANTIC LEAP	46
VIII. NOTHING SUCCEEDS LIKE SUCCESS	51
IX. IN THE JAWS OF DEATH	56
X. THE STORMY NIGHT	63
XI. POINTED QUESTIONS	71
XII. THE UNEXPECTED VISITOR	79
XIII. DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND	83
XIV. THE GALLOWES THREATENS TO WORK BOTH WAYS	90
XV. FALLEN GREATNESS SEEKS AN ASYLUM ...	97
XVI. THE GRATITUDE OF PTOLEMY	101
XVII. THE HOSPITALITY OF EGYPT	105
XVIII. A DARING ENTERPRISE	111
XIX. VENUS AND MARS	116
XX. A KING WITHOUT HIS QUEEN	125
XXI. THE DAY OF VENGEANCE	133
XXII. THE MUFFLED MAN	141
XXIII. IN THE ROYAL PALACE	145
XXIV. THE BANQUET	152
XXV. THE ADVENTURE	161
XXVI. NO NEWS IS BAD NEWS	170

CHAPTER.	PAGE.
XXVII. UNDER THE SHADOW OF DEATH ...	176
XXVIII. THE NEGRO ...	182
XXIX. HOMEWARD BOUND ...	193
XXX. JEALOUSY CLOTHED WITH VIRTUE ...	201
XXXI. THE VICTOR EVER VICTORIOUS ...	210
XXXII. THE CUP OF MISERY DRUNK TO THE DREGS...	218
XXXIII. CLEOPATRA ERRS ON THE SAFE SIDE ...	229
XXXIV. THE STORY OF A DEAD MAN RELATED BY A DYING MAN ...	238
XXXV. LOVE STRONGER THAN SLAVERY ...	262
XXXVI. DIVINE ELECT ...	269
XXXVII. JUPITER AND HIS SON ...	278
XXXVIII. THE FATAL EMBLEM OF AUTHORITY ...	286
XXXIX. THE FATAL ARRIVAL ...	294
XL. THE POLITICS OF CÆSAR AND THE POLITICS OF CLEOPATRA ...	300
XLI. THE DREAM OF CALPHURNIA ...	310
XLII. CONSPIRACY IS RIFE ...	317
XLIII. THE MORNING OF THE IDES OF MARCH ...	325
XLIV. THE NOON OF THE IDES OF MARCH ...	336
XLV. THE EVENING OF THE IDES OF MARCH ...	351
XLVI. MORTAL ENEMIES FACE TO FACE ...	367
XLVII. FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH ...	377
XLVIII. THE APPARITION ...	386
XLIX. AN UNPLEASANT INTERVIEW ...	395
L. AT PHILIPPI ...	405
LI. BETWIXT THE CUP AND THE LIP ...	409
LII. THE STAGE CURTAIN DROPS ...	417



CÆSAR AND CLEOPATRA.

CHAPTER I.

VENUS IN TROUBLE.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT, while he was lying helpless on his death-bed, and the flame of life was rapidly flickering away from its noble shrine, was asked to nominate a successor to his vast Empire. His laconic answer was—"The most worthy." In the fatal struggle for supremacy among his generals which followed his death Egypt fell to the lot of Ptolemy, one of his bravest officers. Ptolemy, after having passed the prime of manhood, had no more ambition for adventures and conquests. The steady, but firm, hand of time was telling on his strong muscular frame, and he settled down to a life of comparative ease and rest, directing his energies to furthering the well-being and happiness of his subjects.

Among the magnificent buildings he raised in Alexandria was a huge palace, a marvel of its time, which became afterwards the abode of the Reigning Family. It stood on the

most picturesque site of the city, on the Mediterranean, its boundary wall washed by its waves. Nearly three centuries had passed, and this wonderful building was almost as firm and fresh as when it was erected.

The State saloon was furnished with the best the riches and luxury of the East could produce. One single magnificent Persian carpet covered the marble floor. The most costly Cashmere curtains the hands of art could manufacture were drawn down with graceful taste. Beautiful tables of ivory were stationed in different parts, with massive silver chairs round them. The four corners of the saloon were relieved with Tyrian purple sofas, glorious to look at. Brackets of rare wood decorated the walls, while the intervening spaces were covered with coloured silk, embroidered according to graceful Indian taste. On the carpet were spread the skins of lions and tigers. The ceiling was painted after the elegant Greek style, with lions on different parts of it, and from each paw hung down a gold chain with a gold lamp attached to it below. Above the entrance door, on the inside, was seen a sword, a javelin, and a mantle floating over them; the honoured relics left by the illustrious founder of the dynasty.

Near one of the windows of this saloon, on a silver chair, sat a young lady with her beautiful head on her hand, and her white arm on the round ivory table before her. Her hair was jet black, and carelessly floating down to her waist. Her eyes were black and large, sparkling with light and intelligence. The cheeks were of that fresh, healthy colour which always reminds you of a rosebud just opening into life. The lips were of the same captivating colour, the lower lip being curled a little downwards. Her hands and feet were exceedingly delicate and small, and when she stood up her tall and erect

stature, combined with her powerful eyes, gave her a look of beauty and haughtiness which at once inspired respect and admiration.

It was now evening, and the full moon was high up in the sky. Her silvery rays shed down on the sea a flood of faint light, which was reflected from its surface as from glass. The sky was quite clear and cloudless, and the stars shone down brilliantly from its blue dome. A mild zephyr blew now and then, making slight undulations on the face of the sea. Laden with fragrance, the soft airs swept gently and quietly over the face of the young lady, causing some locks of her beautiful hair to fall down her ruddy cheeks.

Below the window was an extensive garden, with high trees and all kinds of beautiful shrubs and flowers, emitting rare odours. In some parts there were natural arbours made of beautiful ivy, which climbed the surrounding trees. In other places the vines were entwined in such a manner as to allow both leaves and fruits to hang down inside the cool arbour.

The lady sat motionless, her head leaning on her hand. Her eyes were fixed on the blue sea that extended below her. Before her on the little table was a rare vase, filled with a beautiful bouquet of flowers, but they were unheeded. At her side was an elegant harp, inlaid with ivory and gold, but she did not touch it. Beside the vase was a goblet of delicious wine, with different kinds of confectionery near it, but they were never tasted. Like a goddess the fairy lady sat, beautiful and reflective.

A full hour passed, but she never stirred from that charming attitude. At last she drew a long, deep sigh, and lifted up her majestic head, with her big, piercing eyes wandering round the hall, until they rested on the relics hanging over the entrance

door. She looked at them in a strange manner, her heart filled with sad pride, when a young woman gently glided into the hall, and addressed her in a respectful manner.

"Your Majesty, the King," she said.

"At such a late hour of the night?" murmured the Queen.

"At such a late hour of the night," echoed the maid.

"His late visits always forebode evil tidings, Iras."

"I hope this will be an exception to-night," replied the latter.

"We shall see," murmured the Queen.

A moment later and Ptolemy was ushered into the presence of Cleopatra, who was, according to the Egyptian custom, both his sister and his consort.

He was of slender form, rather tall for his age, with dark hair and dark eyes, but there was something sluggish and cunning about the latter. His nose was a little aquiline, and his lips thin and small, but he had no moustache or beard about his face. His behaviour and appearance, coupled with his tender years, left you in doubt whether he was a boy or a man.

The Queen rose in a dignified manner from her seat, and saluted the King, then, pointing to a silver chair on the opposite side of the little ivory table, she motioned him to take a seat. As he sat down he surveyed the table, and, darting a glance at the beautiful harp close by, he parted his lips in a sardonic smile.

"You seem to be very happy," he remarked.

"We are always happy in the company of our brother."

"I mean to say that your Majesty is always happy, even when the company of the brother is not to be had."

"It is the anticipation of his company that makes us so, even in our lonely moments."

"I wish I were a Queen," murmured Ptolemy.

"Isn't it pleasant enough for you to be a King?"

"Not exactly so, but there is always something charming in a Queen, which you don't find in a King."

Cleopatra lifted her eyes again towards the relics over the door, and gave a long sigh.

"Does my childish desire vex you, sister?"

"No; but just before you entered the hall our eyes were resting on these precious relics, and, to tell you the truth, we wished we were a man."

"*You* wish you were a man!" echoed the King, with astonishment.

"We desired to be so before you entered."

"What would you do, suppose you were a man?"

"What those noble relics once did."

"But your Majesty is a Queen without their aid."

"To be a Queen over Egypt is one thing; to be a Queen over the whole world is quite a different thing."

Ptolemy opened his eyes, until it was impossible to open them any further.

"You have a weak chance of keeping your own ground as things stand," said he, after a moment's pause; "affairs are taking a critical turn, madam."

Cleopatra, as if stabbed with a sharp dagger, drew herself up to her full height, and stared at the young King.

"Don't stare so much at me, your Majesty; I have bad news to give you, and you must be prepared for it. You know," went on the King, without giving her time to rally, "you know these Alexandrians are giving me much trouble, much

more than a King would expect. They have pushed their demands to the extreme, and what can one King do against a multitude? It would take an army of kings to subdue an army of rebels," resumed he in a semi-boyish, semi-sarcastic way, "but kings are so few, as you know, and that's the pity of it; they have to give in to the people."

The Queen darted a look at him so full of contempt that he could scarcely misunderstand it.

"Is that what you came for?" she ejaculated, with that calmness which despair alone can inspire.

"Bless my life! What else do you expect me to come for, at this late hour of the night?"

"It is like his idiotic way," murmured the Queen to herself, in a manner which was almost audible to the King.

Whether the King did not hear her remark, or whether he feigned not to have heard it, he went on with his lecture uninterrupted.

"You know," resumed his Majesty, "the Egyptians are beginning to feel tired of our joint sovereignty, especially as they remark that the law of the nation is your arbitrary will. They were even impertinent enough to criticise the justice you have been practising for these few last months. They say you have despatched a good number of their princes to the gallows, while others were despatched nobody knows where. These Alexandrians—plague take them!—are beginning to murmur loudly at these transactions; they have even gone so far as to declare publicly that kings are made for the people, and not the people for the kings; and you know, sister, it grieves me to hear such nonsense."

The calmness which possessed Cleopatra was changed now into fury; her cheeks were flushed with the fire of anger,

and her eyes blazed as with lightning. The vehemence of the woman asserted itself over the dignity of the Queen.

“Unworthy son of Ptolemy!” she shrieked, exasperated, “if you have forgotten to be the son of that illustrious king whose sword is hanging over yon door, I have not forgotten to be his daughter. I was born the daughter of a king, and, as a queen, I shall wield my royal weapon to the very last day of my life. I shall deck my city wall with the heads of these Egyptian curs, until there is none left to bark; I shall have every impertinent prince swinging on the gallows until there are no more of them to swing. I cannot bear to see high heads lifted up in my kingdom. Every one of them must be prostrate, if not from a motive of veneration, at least from the motive of the axe. I will have no impertinence in my dominion. I can bear anything but that. I must,” went on the Queen, keeping to the singular, “I must reign supreme; I will have no sham of a sceptre; either wield it royally or not at all. These dogs of Egyptians talk about kings being made for the people! They are not mistaken, for kings are made to bring every lofty head, and every haughty man, to dust. This is the law of kings ever since the world was built, and it shall be so to the very end. Pray,” added the Queen, with a bitter smile, “where did you learn this lecture you have been giving me? You seem to have learnt your lesson marvellously well for your age.”

The little King, who was well acquainted with the temperament of his sister, was not a bit astounded. He knew her haughty manner and her stubborn determination, and, like a man who felt to be the master of his position, he was calm.

"My dear sister," he went on, "what else can I do? Deprived of any active share in the affairs of the Empire, and still placed between two guardians, what else can I do but recite the lesson I got from them? I am grateful for your compliment; it is encouraging to have more lessons from them."

"Remember," retorted Cleopatra, "that we must keep up the dignity of our royal house. We must reign as becomes kings and queens."

"It is the first time you have spoken in the plural sense. To hear you talk, one would think you were speaking to one of your subjects, madam."

"What would you have me do?" replied the Queen, in an impatient manner.

"I do not like this swinging system of your Majesty, and my views regarding the decoration of our city wall differ a little from your's. I think that human heads are ghastly decorations after all. I enjoy being a king immensely, but if things go on at this rate there soon will be no people to reign over."

Cleopatra, to her dread, began to see as clear as noonday that Ptolemy's answers were something more than a lesson learnt by heart. She saw, with her keen penetration, that she was speaking to a man and not a puppy, as she had formerly taken him to be. This roused her latent energy. It promised excitement. She was speaking to a man of politics, and this made her feel more at home. You can never be a very successful politician unless you have a great capacity for deceiving, and when it came to that, Cleopatra felt she was on sure ground.

"It was to get rid of dangerous creatures," murmured

she, in a fascinating way; "it was to preserve the crown handed down to us from the favourite of Alexander, that I was a little severe with the nobility. Remember, my dear brother, that if you do not get rid of these dangerous nobles in one way or other, they will be sure to get rid of you; whatever may be the number of princes and nobles removed, there will always be a lot of people left to be ruled; but if *we* are removed, then all is lost."

"Allow me to try my own methods, madam; you have tried yours for a considerable length of time, until the whole nation from end to end groans under it. Permit me to try something less destructive, your Majesty. It is well enough to rule a nation with a rod of iron, but if you make it red hot before using it—well, it becomes absolutely intolerable."

"As you please, my lord," replied the Queen; "try your methods and note down their result."

The King, having got through this interview to his satisfaction, rose from his seat, and, taking leave of the Queen, left the saloon with a smile on his face but a cloud on his heart.

"Oh, the monster!" murmured he to himself, as he walked in the corridor; "she speaks like a cruel-hearted man!"

The moment he disappeared, Cleopatra threw herself on an easy chair.

"The coward!" cried she, in an audible voice, "he speaks like a faint-hearted woman!"

CHAPTER II.

ROMAN POLITICS.

THE Roman Republic at this period still seemed to be a powerful Constitution. The most warlike nations of the world were under her sway ; her Senate promulgated laws that were respected far and wide ; her verdict over international interests passed unchallenged ; and where Rome said " Yes " there was not a single monarch who had the intrepidity to say " No." To all appearances the Republic was flourishing, and nothing could shake its stability ; but in truth it was fast decaying. That huge ship, which once had braved both storms and waves, required now only a skilful pilot who could wisely hold the helm and steer it safely forward.

There appeared at this juncture two great men, who, under the garb of the Republic, aimed at nothing short of royalty. Each accused his rival of being an ambitious man, aiming at tyranny, while representing himself as a great humanitarian sacrificing himself at the altar of the nation. While these ambitions were revolving in their minds circumstances brought things to a crisis.

In one of the most beautiful villas of Rome sat a man in a meditative mood. He had already passed the prime of manhood ; but his frame was still muscular and well built. His temples were sprinkled with silvery hairs ; but there was something in the expression of his keen eyes which plainly indicated that ambition was not declining with his age. His

brows were knit, and there was rather a frowning expression on his whole face indicative of mental strain. He was restless. Before him was a big parchment, with ink and pen beside it. He took the parchment, threw a rapid glance at it, and then laid it down. He lifted his eyes from the table to the ceiling, and cast them down again in deep reflection. At last he rose from his seat, walked to a window, and surveyed the beautiful panorama that presented itself to his eyes. Rome, with all her splendour, rose before him like a fairy city in a fairy land. Her great palaces towered high up into the sky, haughty and majestic, like their dwellers. The hum of the people struck upon his ears like muffled drums beaten at a distance. The Tiber glided on in her zig-zag channel like a huge serpent, while her waters sparkled in the sun. Shadows in the streets flitted here and there like phantoms, and the sounds of carriages and carts came, deadened by the distance. Round the villa itself all was still, and the beauty of nature round it made it look like a little paradise. But of all these surroundings the man in the window was quite unmindful. His eyes wandered far in the distance, as if he was expecting the arrival of somebody. Then he left the window and began to walk mechanically about the room as if to kill time. Thoughts of the utmost importance seemed to be occupying his mind. The man was Pompey the Great.

The person whom Pompey was impatiently waiting for was now wending his way towards the Great City. He had been travelling day and night without rest, except what was absolutely necessary for refreshment and giving the horses breathing time. With him was a servant, who was doing his utmost to keep up with his master. They were both coming from the regions of Gallia, or the boundary thereabout. Half

way they met a horseman coming from the direction of Rome and taking an opposite route. The moment Pompey's man saw this horseman he lowered down the visor of his helmet so as to hide his features. The other already had his pulled down, and when they met they scanned each other as if trying to pierce with their eyes the metallic plates that hid their faces. It was but a glance, and each horseman continued his way in the opposite direction as rapidly as he could.

Just as the sun was setting behind one of the hills on which Rome was built a clatter of hoofs was heard in the garden court. The master nimbly dismounted from the saddle, and, throwing the bridle to his servant, he looked affectionately at his horse. The nostrils of the noble animal were working up and down for breath; but the fire that darted from his eyes and his lofty curbed neck suggested that the steed was proud of his achievements, as well he might be. His master looked at him proudly. "Bravissimo, Hannibal!" said he, in a patronising tone. The horse, as if understanding the compliment paid him, lowered his neck and licked the hand that was lovingly offered him. Stroking the shaggy mane of his steed, the horseman mounted the flight of steps in an impatient way. A minute later he was in the presence of Pompey.

He was a young man about thirty-four or thirty-five years of age; a little thin, but gentlemanlike in his appearance. His face, though naturally somewhat pale, looked now ruddy, owing to exposure to the sun. His nose was of that aquiline type which denotes a firm determination, while his eyes were keen and restless. The dust that covered his boots and garments bespoke a long and tiresome journey, but nevertheless he looked fresh in face and gait.

The moment the horseman entered the room Pompey, who

was trying not to betray any anxiety or impatience, rose in a dignified manner to meet him, and saluted him cordially.

"Well, Brutus, you have arrived at last," said he, in a careless manner. "Although I was anxious to see you, I never dreamt you would be able to do the journey in such a short period."

"It is noble Hannibal we have to thank," replied the young man; "he is a brave steed, and I won't part with him for a fortune."

"Hannibal is a dangerous name, my dear young man; Rome must feel somewhat uneasy at his presence."

"I hope that, unlike his namesake, his movements will always be for the well-being of the Capital," said Brutus laughingly.

"I trust so, I trust so," remarked the General good-naturedly. "Well," continued he, "poor Hannibal rests in his grave now, and Rome has no more fear of the Carthaginian hero. Her fears are now from that scheming man who, though he bears a Roman name, meditates one of the most fatal blows that ever Rome's enemies could devise. But now to business. Well, what news do you bring with you?"

"He is camping at the border."

"Is there much disaffection among his soldiers?"

"None, they are all attached to him."

"What!" ejaculated the General vehemently, "the Roman soldiers—the brave Roman soldiers—forgetting their duty to their country and adhering to an adventurer! The Gods forbid!"

"He pretends that it is the cause of the Republic that he is espousing now, and people are easily deceived, you know."

Pompey winced involuntarily; it was the same excuse he

was trying to dazzle people with, while his real aim was absolute power.

“What are his movements, Brutus? Could you come to any definite conclusion regarding them? What does he intend to do in case he is declared a rebel?”

“He means to cross the boundary and force Rome to yield.”

“To yield to what?”

“To his Consulship.”

“And has it ever occurred in the history of Rome that a candidate entered the city with an armed force? He is a rebel, and no candidate.”

“Well, he declared he would agree to disband his soldiers, if you would disband yours.”

“Mine? My soldiers? I have none; they are Rome’s soldiers, and I have the authority of the nation for my office. Does he call the army with him *his* soldiers, and still look upon himself as a loyal servant of the State? Well, well, his is beautiful logic, my dear Brutus, and his loyalty is crowned by marching at the head of an army against the State he pretends to defend.”

“He declared it was against Pompey he was marching, and not against Rome.”

“He who marches against Pompey marches against Rome,” rejoined the General, with impetuosity; but no sooner were the words uttered than regretted. Pompey bit his lips until the blood almost came, but he at once regained his calmness.

“I have already told you,” went on the speaker; “I have already told you that I hold my position from Rome, and, therefore, he who attacks Pompey commits a crime against the nation at large by thus insulting her.”

"But he will not live to attack either Rome or Pompey," muttered Brutus in a sullen manner.

"What do you mean, my good fellow?"

"I mean that at the present moment there is a formidable plot against him, and his head has but a doubtful chance of remaining on his shoulders."

Whatever the ambitions of Pompey were, he was an honourable man. He darted at Brutus one of his looks which would have terrified any man but a Brutus.

"I can scarcely believe my ears," thundered Pompey. "Do you really mean to say that you have gone so far as to plan Cæsar's destruction by foul means? I would rather be ten times conquered by him and see him reign supreme in Rome than resort to such unworthy measures. You have exceeded your orders, Brutus."

"As for me," answered the latter, "I would rather plunge my dagger ten times in his heart than see him set foot in Rome to destroy the Republic. I would conspire against any man that dares to meditate aggressive steps against the safety of the State. But to put your mind at rest, I must hasten to say that the conspiracy was rife before my arrival. It is organised by several Gallian chiefs in his own camp. My presence only encouraged it, though I have no hand in it. If all goes on well this midnight, there will be no tyrant to pester Rome."

"You remember, my dear friend, that when Rome was even in much greater peril than she is now; when she was threatened with conquest by a foreign prince, she would have no foul play. Pyrrhus pressed our dear land so sorely that it was a case of life and death with the nation. His physician proposed to our generals to have him poisoned if a certain sum of money was granted him. Our generals not only refused to

accede to this treason, but sent the letter to Pyrrhus apprising him of the danger. This is the honest straightforward Roman way, and it must always be so. Rome ought never to have foul play, ought never to countenance anything like foul play. Come what may, I must warn our enemy of the danger that lies before him. But," continued the speaker after a moment's pause, "but you say it will take place to-night? Oh, well, it is too late, but I swear to you by the memory of my father, that if he were within a short distance I would now fly and warn him in time to prevent his assassination. Horrible! Horrible!"

As he spoke, Pompey's face assumed a noble expression, and his eyes shone with a grand light. Whatever Brutus' ideas regarding patriotism were, he could not stand before this torrent of righteous anger. He was simply mute, and admiring Pompey the more.

"Well," said Brutus after a pause, "I have no share in the plot and my hands are clean; but we must pursue our own measures as if no plot existed; this would be both wiser and nobler."

"There you talk like yourself," remarked the General, smilingly; "if virtue cannot conquer nothing should conquer. You say," resumed he, "you say that he is going to cross the boundary regardless of all previous forms and etiquette? He then means to defy the Republic; he means bloodshed and civil war, and, what is worse than all that, he means to usurp the authority of the nation. Well, well, I foresaw all that, and, therefore, this parchment has been already prepared,"—and Pompey placed his hand on it—"Cæsar is declared a rebel, and as a rebel he shall be treated. He shall have no mercy at the hand of the Government he aimed at, and no sympathy from

any loyal Roman, no help from any patriotic soldier, but, like a man who has been deserted both by gods and men, he shall meet the fate which the law inflicts as surely as any criminal met his. To-morrow will declare him a rebel, and the Republic knows but too well how to defend herself and punish her enemies."

"The audacity of Cæsar," remarked Brutus, "makes me a little suspicious. I believe he has been communicating with some influential people in the city, and I would not be a bit astonished if he has received some encouragement from one quarter or another. Midway I met a strange horseman who was riding at full gallop towards Cæsar's camp; his manner made me somewhat suspicious, and although his helmet was tight on his head and his visor well pulled over his face, I could swear that he was one of Cæsar's creatures."

"Whom did you take the rider for?"

"If I am not mistaken he did not look unlike Mark Antony."

A pleasant smile parted Pompey's lips, and his face assumed that expression of tenderness which he always lavished on Brutus. If there were any traces of displeasure left in his heart against the young man they vanished now. Pompey saw clearly, that though the youngest among his party, Brutus was the most keen-sighted.

"You guessed right, my dear Brutus, and I admire your penetration; it *was* Mark Antony, and he came to intrigue against the Republic and Pompey."

"Indeed," answered Brutus, "and you were aware of the fact?"

"Well," said the General carelessly, "Antony thought he made a clever stroke and delivered his message with great promptitude and secrecy. His movements were watched

from the first moment he set foot in Rome to the moment he departed, but he didn't stay long."

"What was his message?"

"Antony, after having been expelled from the Senate Chamber, took it into his head that he could make a better politician out of it than in it; he came to communicate with some of the Senators here, and tried his utmost to make them side with Cæsar, but all to no purpose; he utterly failed."

"I have no fear of Mark Antony; he is a pleasant-going young man, and provided he tastes a good draught of wine, or looks at a pretty face, he doesn't care a straw what will become of Rome or the Roman Government."

"I have no fear of Cæsar either," replied Pompey; "I believe he is more fond of pleasures than Antony. There were some dangerous signs about him when he was implicated in the Catiline business, but Cicero remarked to me at the time that his ambition was counter-balanced by the great attention he paid to his toilette; that totally dispelled all fears. This was Cicero's verdict, and Cicero, you know, is the greatest philosopher in Rome, and his views ought to be respected."

"May be, but Cæsar is a dubious character, and the hand that handled the comb so elegantly handles the sword as skillfully. He is a combination of incompatibles; I would be on my guard."

"He will find it a hot business when he has to deal with the Conqueror of Mithridates. One day he shall lament his rebellious nature when it will be too late to reform his character."

"In any case," suggested the young man, "we must try and gather as many soldiers as possible. We are on the point of a crisis, and everything must be prepared with much foresight. I believe, if I am allowed to give an opinion, that the state of

the army at present is not quite adequate to cope with the dangers that threaten us."

"When it is necessary, Pompey has simply to stamp and soldiers will appear in legions from under the ground. I have only to stamp," reiterated the General, "do you hear me?"

"It is all very well, but, on the whole, Earth is an obstinate creature, and the only result one sometimes has from stamping is to get a sore foot. As for me, I believe in having soldiers ready for every emergency; and if stamping will do good it is all the better, but if, on the other hand, it is useless, we will be none the worse."

"You are too cautious, Brutus; leave this to me. You must be very tired now, and it is unkind of me to keep you any longer."

As Pompey came to the end of his sentence his servant entered the room and announced a Senator.

"Until to-morrow," said he to Brutus, whom he embraced affectionately as he took his departure.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE BANKS OF THE RUBICON.

ON the Gallian boundary, adjacent to the Roman territory, there was a beautiful spot. A little brook separated the Gallian and Roman territory in that district. On the Gallic side there were numerous tents pitched on an extensive plain. Bands of brave soldiers were strolling here and there in an easy manner. Those who were on duty were stern, attentive, and severe; those off duty looked happy and light-hearted. Knots of men were seen marching together, and singing national songs with much mirth and humour; others were running and playing like big boys; some were stretched on the green grass to their full length; others were chattering boisterously, and trying to be mischievous to their comrades; some were gathering flowers and others climbing up trees, while others, not knowing what to do with themselves, leaned against little rocks and looked thoughtfully up to the sky like great philosophers.

But if the soldiers were thoughtless and gay and rambling, the officers were quite different. They were strolling the flower-strewn field quite unmindful of what was around them. They conversed with each other in a low, serious manner. Their faces were grave; their eyes bright, but fixed; they were restless and ill at ease. There was something in the expression of their features which foreshadowed battle.

Among the tents pitched in the plain there was one on a

hill a little separated from the rest and of a much larger size. Sentinels were placed round it at a respectful distance. The perfect order and calmness near this tent, with the erect reverential attitude of the soldiers near it, indicated that it was occupied by a great man of rank. Everything in the neighbourhood of this tent was transacted with the greatest promptitude and without the least noise. The steps of the officers that neared it were noiseless, but firm and measured as became valiant soldiers. Now and then an officer would step out from its door in a reflective manner, while others were to be seen entering with serious and grave faces.

From the upper part of the central tent-pole floated the Roman Eagle of the Republic. The wind was ruffling it, but nevertheless the king of birds could be distinguished with its keen fixed eyes looking at the soldiers with all his usual majesty. If the man inside the tent is a great man he must be a Roman.

The interior of the tent was very simple; a table in the centre and a few chairs round it were all that could be seen. Before the table was sitting a man of a fine ruddy complexion and of ripe age. He had big black eyes, piercing and bright, full of intelligence, restless and keen. His face was smooth and radiant; his hair was of a brown colour. His high broad forehead and his baldness gave a strikingly majestic appearance to his expression. He was of a graceful, tall stature. His hands were neat and delicate, and, despite the continuous handling of the sword, looked almost feminine in their shape. The appearance of his face and the way his hair was arranged gave you the impression that he was not indifferent to external effects. Unlike a man who has been exposed to much hardships and rough military life, he

was rather particular about the way he dressed himself, but once he was satisfied on this score he paid no more attention to these petty affairs. There was a benignant expression on the face which at once took away any idea of cruelty, but his keen eyes and firm lips left no doubt that, coupled with his natural gentleness, he was firm and resolute. The man we are portraying is Julius Cæsar. After having vanquished the Gauls he was encamping now with his brave army near the little brook called Rubicon, which was the natural boundary between Cæsar's province and Italy proper.

It was now early in the morning, and the breeze was blowing gently into the tent. The view of nature outside was simply picturesque. Hills covered with trees for a considerable distance delighted the eyes; the plains were covered with green grass and wild flowers; the birds of the air were seen here and there in their usual brisk, busy way. The brook also added to the beauty of nature around it. With its slow mournful murmurs it seemed as if relating a sad pathetic story in low whispers: but who could understand the silent language of the Rubicon? The man to whom these melancholy low tones appealed was too busy in his tent to heed them. Cæsar went on with his pressing affairs, and the brook went on unheeding him.

Cæsar was seated on a plain chair before the plain table, writing on a piece of parchment as quickly as he could. One would have thought he was copying and not writing original matter, but such was not the case. One of his characteristics was that he could handle both pen and sword alike; he was as quick and skilful with the one as with the other, so that you could not tell whether he was more of a writer or a soldier.

From the way he bent over the table, and the peculiar expression that manifested itself now and then on his face, one could see that he was dealing with an important message ; but, unlike other people writing important messages, he never re-read a single line to see whether it was correct or not ; not a sigh, not even a long breath relieved his monotonous work. Like a living machine he went on thinking and writing, his hand emulating the velocity of his brain.

This occupation, however, did not go on uninterrupted. Several messages were delivered silently, but respectfully, by an aide-de-camp. The General would throw a rapid glance at each message, and put it aside on the table until a little heap was made before him. His thoughts, nevertheless, were not diverted from the task before him, and he could follow the thread of his thought after being interrupted with a new message as well as if no interruption had taken place.

It was almost noon now when another message was delivered to him. Cæsar took it with his left hand and glanced hastily at it. Unlike the other messages he did not add it to the little hill of parchments before him, but read it thoughtfully and attentively. His eyes looked a little brighter as he read it, and a slight twitch manifested itself round the mouth, but besides that nothing particular could be noticed about him. However, Cæsar stopped writing, a small bell was standing on the table near his hand, and the General touched it, when immediately an attendant appeared and saluted as usual. Cæsar gave him a short decisive order in a stern voice, and then, as if nothing had taken place, he resumed his pen and parchment.

Just as the General finished writing a man was ushered into his presence. An interrogation of a serious nature followed.

The man replied to every question quietly and satisfactorily, when he was ordered to withdraw. A few moments later and there was a great bustle in the camp; horsemen were riding in a certain direction with great haste, but decent order. Officers of higher ranks began to appear and disappear with serious looks.

A couple of hours later and there was more bustle. Some prisoners between spearmen were now brought before Cæsar. The way in which men were ushered in and others out, suggested that something of the nature of a trial was going on inside the tent, but without any confusion; then, like a dead silence after a severe storm, everything was again calm and serene.

The day was drawing to a close, and Cæsar felt a little uneasy and anxious; true he was still writing on, but every moment the sun progressed towards the west; the general threw an anxious look towards the door of his tent, and then resumed his work. Strong-minded and strong-handed as he was, he was after all a mortal, and, like every other living creature, he felt something like fatigue beginning to take possession of him, and having finished the task that was before him, Cæsar laid his pen on the table, rose from his seat, and went to the tent-door. He stood there a commanding figure, grave and still.

The view before him now differed a little from that which presented itself in the morning. The sun was about setting, and objects looked rather blurred with a dark purple tinge about them. The sky was of evening orange colour. Cæsar thought it smiled on him.

The Roman General looked far into the distance towards Rome, and there was something in his look that signified

anxious expectation. The day had been an exceptionally busy and trying one in his life. Something was weighing heavily on his mind. He looked towards the sun, and that great orb was now going fast towards setting. Again the General looked towards Rome, and again a sigh of disappointment manifested itself in his face. As he was turning back to his tent he thought he perceived a cloud of dust in the far distance, and he was not mistaken. With his keen far-seeing eyes he could see objects miles away. Nearer and nearer the dust column came, with a horseman as its centre. Quicker and quicker the horseman dashed on until he got to the very door of Cæsar's tent.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HORSEMAN.

IT was just sunset when the horseman drew rein before the tent. The moment he perceived the General at the door the rider nimbly dismounted from the saddle, and saluted Cæsar with a military attitude which, though respectful, suggested the familiarity that exists between the superior and his confidant. The arrival of the new visitor coincided exactly with the time at which Brutus gained the villa of Pompey.

The horse was in a bath of perspiration, and foam flecked the animal's shoulders and haunches. He was labouring hard for breath, but his eyes were fiery, and his head erect. The way he pricked his ears and turned his head at the least sound showed plainly that he was anything but exhausted.

"Good Scipio!" said the rider addressing his horse, "go and have food and rest now; we shall meet again on the morrow." So saying, he tapped him on the middle of the forehead, and throwing the rein to a soldier close by, he followed Cæsar into the tent.

The rider was a well-built man with muscular arms and strong constitution; eyes and hair were of dark brown colour. He was in the full vigour of manhood, but his placid countenance suggested that pleasure and not ambition was his sole aim. His journey seemed to have been a long one, for he was covered with dust from head to foot.

As soon as they were alone in the tent, Cæsar shook the

horseman warmly by the hand, and resting the other on his shoulder looked attentively into his face as if trying to penetrate into his mind, but the visor of the horseman hid all the expression and nothing was seen behind it but his two bright eyes. However, he soon lifted up the visor, and uncovering his head, his genial features were fully seen.

“Well done, noble Antony!” said Cæsar, shaking him warmly once more, “you have won your wager; the moment you alighted from the saddle the last rays of the sun were fading fast from the hill-tops.”

“And so Cæsar is beaten for the first time,” replied Antony jokingly.

“Cæsar may sometimes allow himself to be beaten by his friends, but never by his enemies.”

“Those very friends will never allow him to be beaten by his foes even if Cæsar wished it,” remarked Antony, playfully. “Well, sir,” resumed he, in a serious manner, “Rome is in a fine uproar, and when Rome is in uproar the whole world, you know, is in perfect confusion.”

Julius Cæsar was now seated on a chair with his left arm resting on the table, and his head supported by his right palm. He gazed at Antony when the latter spoke, and his face displayed one of those smiles which indicated self-confidence and self-esteem at the same time,

“Rome is in a fine uproar,” reiterated Antony in his honest boisterous manner, “but, though the public opinion is divided, I must confess that the vast majority side with our enemy.”

“Have you interviewed any of the Senators?” asked Cæsar, with his keen eyes fixed on those of Antony.

“Certainly, the first moment I arrived I directed my steps towards the house of Lena.”

“And Lena?” asked Cæsar, anxiously.

“Lena was not at home. On inquiry I found he had made his way to Cicero’s for some important business. As both of them were the two members we arranged I should interview, I made at once to Cicero’s, and sure enough both Senators were there.”

Antony paused now for breath, but Cæsar forgetting that his friend had come from a fatiguing journey, and being all anxiety to know the result of this affair, simply looked into the face of Antony all the more keenly and bade him go on.

“Both of them received me kindly, but ceremoniously; Cicero gave me a long eloquent lecture on the duty of every Roman citizen to the State. Bless my life if I understood a single word of all his philosophy. After he had exhausted the flood of his eloquence, I came straight to the point—philosophy or no philosophy, I had no time to lose—I touched on the subject bluntly and abruptly.”

“It wouldn’t have been like Mark Antony if you had acted otherwise,” said Cæsar, smiling.

“Well, whether it was the best policy or not, it was, anyhow, the shortest cut. I am more of a horseman than a philosopher; and, like a horseman in a hurry, when there are short cuts to be taken, I never go by zig-zag paths.”

“Well?”

“Well, Cicero expressed his regard to you; but, according to his views, one way only was feasible in the present circumstances.”

“And this only way?” asked Cæsar, impatiently.

“And this only way was that you should disband your soldiers and hasten to the Capital like a good Roman general.”

“Like a good Roman boy, he should have said,” interrupted Cæsar.

“But this done,” went on Antony, “both Cicero and his colleague promised their full support and the weight of their moral influence. This,” they added, “will make many more friends to Cæsar, and will almost secure him the consulship.”

“Refuse the aid of my brave, brave soldiers,” answered Cæsar; “refuse their aid, and rely upon the support and moral influence of two senators! This very act itself, if followed, would show that I am really unfit to be either consul or anything else. It never entered into their heads that Pompey should do the same?”

“They pretend that in Pompey’s case it is quite different. He holds his authority by the will of the nation.”

“I hold mine by the same will, and I shall retain it, whether by the same or my own will. As long as I have loyal officers and brave soldiers to support my cause, I shall not flinch a single inch from my attitude. Things are now coming to be a matter of might. The good old days when Roman justice was everything are fast decaying, and I have no security in disbanding my army and throwing myself on the mercy of my opponent and the goodwill of fickle friends. Not so; as long as Cæsar has a single regiment, with that single regiment he must achieve what the moral influence of others pretends to effect. What were Lena’s views on the subject?”

“He holds the same opinion as Cicero. He thinks, with him, that in the first place you should disband the army, and then appeal to the generosity of the nation. They prefer you

should do away with this threatening element of the army, and appear as a peaceable candidate in Rome."

"Did they desire anything more from me?"

"This is all they demand."

"They are very modest, exceedingly modest," answered Cæsar, sarcastically. "And Rome—what is the verdict of Rome?"

"This is a difficult question to answer. Rome is a city of sentiment, a capital of emotion now. If Romans take a fancy to a man, they may worship him to-day, but they will be quite ready to crucify him on the morrow if he fails to keep up their enthusiasm. Politics are a game of dice."

"That is not a bad sign, and I must try my luck at dice—you know it's a most tempting game."

"It's a very risky one as well."

"Cæsar never valued his life much when he was playing such terrible games for the sake of his country. He will not value it any more now that he is fighting both for his country and his honour. Have the Senate passed any resolution against their rebel?"

"Not yet, but they mean to do it as soon as possible. I understand Pompey has already filled up the document. The only thing that is keeping him back is the hope that Cæsar may yield at the last moment."

"In that case, the sooner the declaration is made the better; yielding is not a part of Cæsar's nature."

"My impression," went on Antony, not heeding Cæsar's remark—"my impression is that Pompey has been sounding our camp in a mysterious way. There was wind about it in the city, and riding back I met half-way a peculiar horseman with his visor pulled down, who scanned me in a strange

manner. I would lay a wager," went on Antony, a little heated, "that the horseman was Lucilius."

"You would lose your wager," replied Cæsar, with a smile of indifference. "It was a certain young gentleman known by the name of Marcus Brutus."

A slight start was noticed about Mark Antony, who opened his eyes a little wider with astonishment.

"You think it was Brutus?" asked he.

"I didn't say I *think*, I simply said it *was* Brutus."

"You were aware it was Brutus coming to the camp to spy our forces and get wind of our intentions?"

"Yes."

"And you didn't cause him to be arrested?"

"The young man thought he was doing a clever stroke, and it would have been unkind of me to destroy his self-conceit."

"You are a strange man, sir."

"He was implicated in a far more serious business," replied the General indifferently, and smiling all the more bitterly; "he was concerned in a plot of murder."

"Brutus implicated in a plot of murder? and against whom?"

"There is only one man in the Roman world against whom plots and conspiracies are formed, and that man is Julius Cæsar."

"Impossible!" cried Antony.

"You must be cautious how you use this word; impossible things are very few in the world, Antony."

"But what makes you think so?"

"Well, the whole affair was brought to light to-day. Most of the day I have been busy investigating into the business; the affair became quite clear to me."

“ You heard it from witnesses ? ”

“ There was no necessity for witnesses. Information came from a trustworthy source ; the criminals were surprised and confessed all. The time appointed for this murderous action was this very midnight.”

“ And the scoundrels paid with their heads for their treachery, I suppose ? ”

“ On the contrary, they were pardoned.”

“ Pardoned ! ” thundered Antony.

“ Pardoned, and on the spot.”

“ What for ? ”

“ What for ? What do judges pardon criminals for ? ”

“ Judges don't pardon criminals ; they punish them.”

“ You see, I am more than a judge ; I thought it would be great fun to send these would-be assassins to Brutus, and tell him that the plot failed ; and, of course, Brutus would communicate the fact to Pompey, who would hasten the crisis by proclaiming me a rebel.”

“ Do you really mean that Brutus was sent by Pompey to form a plot against Cæsar's head ? It is an unworthy act on the part of any man ; it is a thousand times more so on the part of the head of the Roman Republic.”

“ Well, to tell you the truth, it is a mighty dubious business. The plot was formed by some discontented Gallic chiefs, who are in our camp. I know Brutus had a secret interview with them ; but as to his having a hand in the affair, I have more honourable views both of him and Pompey.”

“ And the rascals must have been delighted to depart with their heads on their shoulders.”

“ Quite the contrary ; they expected no mercy and asked none. In fact, they begged to be punished ; they were over-

whelmed with kindness, but this made me all the firmer in my decision to pardon them."

"You are a strange judge, my dear sir."

"I am no judge at all. If one aims at the sceptre of Rome, one ought to be royally magnanimous."

Antony opened his eyes quite wide; a smile dawned on his face. "You are quite right, I forgot all about it," said he, with a submissive nod.

"You must be very tired now, my dear Antony. I am sorry I kept you so long. Besides," remarked Cæsar, hastily, "I would like to be alone for a few moments; these moments will decide the fate of Cæsar as well as that of Rome."

So saying Julius Cæsar put his arm over his friend's shoulder and walked with him to the tent door.

"We shall meet on the morrow; I am afraid you won't have much sleep to-night, but your toil and loyalty shall be amply repaid when we see better days."

"Don't forget the wager," remarked Antony.

"Well, you won one and lost one; you said you would lay a wager it was Lucilius whom you met on the way, but you shall have your wager all the same, my gallant officer; upon the honour of a Cæsar it shall be done."

"I shall reserve my claim till when it suits me."

"Agreed," answered Cæsar, waving his hand to his friend and re-entering his tent.

CHAPTER V.

A PHILOSOPHER AND HIS DUTY.

ONE bright morning a grey-headed man was wending his steps towards the royal palace of Alexandria. He was of a tall stature with bright black eyes. His silver locks hung over his neck and shoulders. Old age made his steps somewhat infirm, but had no effect on his figure. His face, though naturally of a kind and benignant expression, was now grave and rigid, showing a good deal of the agitation that was troubling his mind. Wherever he walked people did honour to him; crowds cleared a way for him and saluted him with the greatest respect. The white locks, which were as white as snow, were more striking in the sunlight, giving a noble appearance to his features. People left their shops for a moment to take a look at the venerable old man. There was not the slightest doubt that these marks of esteem were genuine. The good old man acknowledged them, but like a man on a solemn duty he went his way, sad and reflective.

At last he stood before the immense building. The guards stationed at the entrance gate offered no hindrance and asked no questions, but simply saluted him as they would have done their General. Door after door was thrown open before him, and gallery after gallery was passed without any interruption. The grandeur of the palace had no effect upon the old man. He walked steadily on until he attained the ante-chamber of the royal saloon. On perceiving him the Master of Ceremonies

hurried to receive him, and then, stepping into the saloon, announced the visitor.

“Dion, your Majesty.”

“The philosopher?” asked Cleopatra.

“Himself, your Royal Highness.”

“He has never been near the palace for several months,” resumed the Queen. “He is coming to plead a personal favour, I suppose?”

“Maybe, but he has never done that before,” answered the Master of Ceremonies.

“In any case, usher him in.”

A moment later and the old philosopher was in the presence of his Queen. Cleopatra was on her royal seat, arrayed in a white robe of silk. Round her neck was a precious necklace of rare pearls, and on her finger glittered a beautiful diamond ring of the purest water. She looked more strikingly majestic than usual, and her lustrous black eyes were more shining than ever. A fan studded with diamonds and fringed with gold was in her right hand. With firmness and dignity Dion walked into the royal saloon, not paying the slightest attention to all the grandeur that was around him.

The Queen turned her eyes towards him, and she was not a little struck with his dignified air and noble appearance. Tall and erect the old man stood before her, with his white locks hanging down his shoulders, and his intelligent eyes looked steadily on the Queen with glints of light coming out from them. The philosopher prostrated himself before the Queen according to the old Egyptian custom, and then, regaining his former posture, he cast his eyes on the floor with a pathetic sadness. The Queen naturally supposed it was the awe she inspired that made the old man timid and tremulous.

“Dion,” began the Queen, “it gives us pleasure to see you again in our court after such a long absence. Be seated and be at ease; your wisdom and age entitle you to sit in the presence of royal personages, even the Queen of Egypt.”

The philosopher remained erect, and very slowly lifted up his eyes.

“I am unworthy of the honour your Majesty confers on your humble servant,” he replied. “If I am allowed to have my choice I would rather remain in my reverential and respectful attitude; I feel more at ease as I am.”

“This is not the first time we accord you this honour; you were thus favoured every time you came here; you were thus favoured in the time of our late sire.”

“Times have changed much since then, madam.”

“Times have changed much, and for the better,” replied the Queen.

“Before a queen one ought to be more reverential than before a king.”

“This bespeaks more honour to the reigning member of our ancient family, and more modesty on the part of our loyal subjects; loyal subjects when modest and old, and endowed with great wisdom, must be favoured. Take a seat, please.”

“It certainly bespeaks more modesty on the part of your Majesty’s loyal subjects,” echoed the venerable philosopher, still standing and not availing himself of the Queen’s favour, “but as my Queen is in her state-saloon seated on her royal seat, I must stand respectfully before her.”

“Dion, you must forget the Queen and only remember the woman. If you were coming in an official capacity as a foreign ambassador, for example, we should not urge you to avail yourself of this favour, but as things are we are pleased

to do away with etiquette. Must we command you to take a seat ? ”

“ Forgive me, madam, but it is in an official capacity, and in the capacity of an ambassador as well, that I come before your Majesty.”

Cleopatra simply stared at the old man with much amazement. She opened her black eyes and smiled. “ Poor old man,” she murmured to herself, “ his old age is telling on him. He is a dotard now.” Then, looking him fully in the face, she could scarcely repress a smile.

“ *You* are coming as an ambassador ? ” retorted the Queen, not knowing what to think of the whole matter. “ Pray how many nations do you represent, and by how many kings are you sent ? ”

“ Many nations and many kings are represented in my poor person,” answered Dion.

“ Good gracious ! ” echoed the Queen, bursting into a laugh. “ You must have been highly promoted without the knowledge of your Queen.”

“ Rank was never my ambition, madam ; I have never done anything to be promoted.”

Cleopatra was now in a pleasant mood, and inclined to indulge in a practical joke.

“ Have you been long in this capacity ? ” she went on. “ It gives us immense pleasure to find one of our subjects lifted up to such an exalted rank.”

“ I have been in this capacity for some time, madam,” rejoined Dion, becoming more and more sad as he went on with this conversation. “ I am sorry to say that I have neglected my duty ; I come now to redeem my character.”

“Poor man!” the Queen murmured to herself, “this is always the case when people become very old; we shouldn’t like to live so long.” Then turning to the old man:—

“You have been such a mighty important man; you have been so all this while, and not have informed us of the fact? It is unkind of you, my dear old philosopher.”

“I come to redeem my character,” continued Dion, not minding her cutting sarcasm, “and it gives me pain to do so, but it is a duty I owe to my nations and kings, and it must be done at any cost.”

“Have the goodness to name these mighty nations and kings you represent. Perhaps we may have to rise from our seat to do honour to such a noble representative; the honour of kings is centred in their ambassadors. Whom do you represent? You make us inquisitive.”

“Well, there must be an end to this farce,” murmured Dion to himself.

“Who are those mighty nations and great kings? We are dying of curiosity; we give you our word of honour that you shall be heard to the last word.”

“Her death,” thought Dion, referring to the first part of her sentence, “her death would be a great boon to the country, but she will live long enough to do much evil and mischief, I am afraid.”

“Proceed, we command you,” said the Queen at last, losing her patience.

“I am the ambassador of all the different nations in your realm. I am the ambassador of the King of Kings. I come in the name of the Egyptian nations that dwell in the valley of the Nile; I come in the name of the gods that dwell in

heaven. You pledged your honour to hear me to the end, and to the end I must be suffered to proceed."

The eyes of the good old man flashed as he spoke and drew himself up to his full height, looking the Queen fully in the face.

Like one awakening from a bad dream, Cleopatra opened her eyes to their full width. Her features assumed one of those looks which made her terrible; her face flushed with rage; and her limbs trembled. She was now undeceived. Dion was no dotard yet, and to her mortification she found that her cutting sarcasms were turned against her.

Whatever Cleopatra was, she was at any rate a shrewd, keen woman, with an unusual amount of penetration. In a moment she perceived the object of the old man's enterprise. She had pledged her honour to hear him, she could not recall her words. He also committed himself too much, and he could not change his steps. Like fascinated beings, the accuser and the accused stared at each other with awe for a few moments, that seemed an age. The philosopher was risking his life in this interview; the Queen was risking her pride, which was dearer to her than life.

"You come on the part of men on earth and gods in heaven?" at last remarked the Queen, in a depressed manner. "You are strange to-day, old man!"

"Strange things require strange men, strange transactions require strange dealing. I carry my life in my hand, your Majesty; I am ready to lay it down for my gods. Oppression creates despair, and despair creates contempt of life. I have not many more days to live, madam, but I would risk my life all the same even if I were in the prime of manhood."

“You look unwell, Dion. We fear you require medical aid.”

“On the honour of a Queen I am allowed to proceed with my message, and on the honour of a Queen I must proceed with it.”

Cleopatra bit her little rosy lip until the blood almost came. She was obviously distressed. The old man was not far wrong; if any man in the whole Egyptian realm was fit to represent the Egyptian nation and her gods, that man was wise Dion. The Queen perceived in his person, still comely and dignified in his old age, the only man who, with propriety, could claim such a duty, and, Queen as she was, she trembled.

“You are allowed to speak,” rejoined she, “our word of honour has been given, our word of honour will never be recalled; but remember,” continued the Queen, with an alarming look, “remember that you speak at the risk of your life. Loftier heads than yours have decorated my walls; richer blood than yours has dyed my soil; nobler locks than yours have kissed the hangman’s axe. It is Queen Cleopatra whom you are speaking to; think and tremble; and now proceed.”

Not a limb shook in Dion’s frame. He stood firm, erect, undaunted—a brave man with a divine message.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OLD MAN'S MESSAGE.

"CLEOPATRA PTOLEMY," began the philosopher, "Queen of Egypt! listen to what Jupiter says to you from his lofty throne in heaven. You have been crowned a queen to administer justice to your subjects, you represent the gods on earth; hence your office is the more sacred when you wield your sceptre sacredly, it is profane when you wield it profanely, it is noble when nobly conducted. It is not for mere pleasure and grandeur that you were made a queen. You were made such to be the defender of the widow, the mother of the orphan, the benefactress of the poor. High above your crown stands the crown of Jupiter; high above your sceptre glitters his sword. You have been entrusted with the most docile nation on the face of the world, you reign in the richest spot of the whole earth, your treasures are full of gold, your stores are full of grain, you are in the prime of life; everything that satisfies body and ambition has been accorded you.

"The eye of Jupiter has been watching the dark proceedings that are taking place in the valley of the Nile. The cry of innocent blood, the cry of the widow, the voice of the poor and oppressed, the tears of the childless and fatherless, have all ascended into the heaven of heavens, praying justice and vengeance. Jupiter's eyes and ears have seen and heard all the misery that is going on in your dominions—miseries terrible and heartrending beyond description.

“You have abused the power that was entrusted to you. The sword that was given you to defend the poor, that very sword you plunged into the hearts of thousands and thousands of them. Wherever you went, there was always a red wave of blood following your footsteps. The noblest and richest blood of Egypt has been mercilessly shed for no other reason than that it was noble and rich. A man may think twice before cutting a flower; you never hesitated in cutting off the lives of thousands. One would think a woman to be the last creature on the face of the earth to think of shedding blood, but, like a wrathful goddess of vengeance, your feet have dabbled in blood.

“I have come before your Majesty not to make a speech, but I come on behalf of those miserable creatures who are suffering silent death, living death, cruel death—all kinds of death. I come to plead the cause of these poor creatures, who are dying of starvation. Do you hear me, madam? Of those people who are dying of starvation! Has it ever been heard of that, in the fertile valley of the Nile—the most productive soil of Egypt—people should die of starvation? People who themselves plough the land and cultivate the soil, and sow the seed, and who make others live by their toil. They are, alas! dying in thousands upon thousands because your agents leave no grain for them to live on. These poor creatures are lashed—every inch of their skin is lashed—until they yield up the last grain and the last coin to their tormentors. Their life is not safe, their property is not safe, their honour is not safe, and, therefore, they are sure of nothing except one thing, and that is death.

“I beg your Majesty to leave this Royal palace for a moment, and walk through the miserable quarters of the city,

and then you can hear the shrieks of the oppressed and the agony of the sufferers. Stir from your abode of ease and pleasure, and see for yourself how these cruel officers, who are put to administer justice, inflict all kinds of barbarity upon the innocent and unoffending. Egypt cannot live long, will not live long, under these tyrannical measures.

“Be their benefactress, madam. Stop your course, which has filled the soil with blood, the injustice which is the curse of the country, the bribery which blinds the eyes of judges, and save your subjects from what must prove to be in the end dire distress and inevitable destruction.

“If you do not consent to be their deliverer, learn that there are gods in heaven who can, and will, surely effect deliverance. They can never allow this work of wickedness and oppression to go on for ever. Queen Cleopatra! the eyes of the gods are upon you; an awful punishment awaits you! If no deliverer rise up to save the country from this deluge of blood and cruelty, if no one dares to blow the trumpet of freedom, learn that the gods are just, and the same hand which has handed so many bitter cups to the Egyptians, the same will hand you yourself a cup full of bitterness—bitterness worse than gall; the marks of blood you shall witness in those you love dearest, your pride will be humbled, your throne will be hewn to pieces, your grandeur will vanish like a dream, your kingdom will be for ever shattered, and the house of Ptolemy for ever annihilated.

“But it is never too late to reform one’s character. Be the queen of humanity and benevolence, and the nation is ready to immortalise your name. Long after you are no more, when a different sovereign occupies the throne where you now sit, she will bless your memory. People walking with their

children, will point out to them the statue of gratitude which would be raised to commemorate your benevolent reign, and say to them:—‘Look, there stands the statue of the good Queen, whose aim was to make her country prosperous and her people happy.’”

Cleopatra, reclining her head on the palm of her hand, and her elbow on the arm of the royal seat, looked more like a statue than a living being. During the whole time the old man spoke not a limb moved, not a muscle twitched, but, like a rigid piece of marble, she kept her big dark eyes fixed on the philosopher.

Scarcely had Dion got this length when Cleopatra could restrain herself no longer. Whether Dion was satisfied with what he had said, or whether he meant to go on, was not evident. One thing, however, was evident, that behind Cleopatra’s indifference and rigidity a volcanic wrath was raging.

“Miserable wretch!” screamed at last the Queen, her face flushed with indignation and her eyes glaring. “Miserable wretch! is it to attain the height of impudence that you were favoured with the honour of our audience? Dotard as you are, you shall meet the fate that awaits all those who dare insult their Queen. Guards!” she screamed once more with all the power of her voice, several high officers at once appearing. “Guards!” went on Cleopatra, her anger more stimulated than appeased by their presence, “take this wretched old dotard and put him in an iron cage; iron cages have been the best institution for beasts ever since the world began. You shall be answerable for him with your heads,” and throwing at the poor old man a look full of scorn and contempt, she waved him from her presence.

When she was alone Cleopatra's flushed face turned deadly pale. There was no manifestation of any stricken conscience, no sign of remorse or repentance, no endeavour to become a better queen or woman. Her philosophy was a little different from that of Dion. One thought only was preying upon her, for her pride was wounded. Pride and pleasure seemed to be the chief ambition of her life, and she was mortified at the idea of being humiliated by any fellow-creature. "He has insulted me," murmured the Queen to herself, "he has insulted me, but he shall pay dearly for his stupid philosophy," and so the terrible fate that was the common lot of the brave and honest was now in store for the wise and patriotic old man.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FRANTIC LEAP.

JUST as Antony left Cæsar's tent, and the General was alone, the latter's features began to assume a very serious expression. As long as Antony was with him Cæsar kept up a bright and smiling countenance : a trick often practised by men of high rank to inspire their followers with a confidence which they do not feel themselves. Left alone, Cæsar now threw himself on the simple rough chair before the table, and grasped his head between his two hands as if to allay some mental distress. These moments were to settle the fate of both Rome and Cæsar ; they were grave moments, which changed the history of the world.

Leaving his seat with his face flushed and eyes blood-shot, he began to walk in his tent. His mind was evidently in a tumult. He kept pacing his tent, with knitted brows and a cloudy face. There was storm ahead. He paused in the centre of his tent. All the bloodshed and misery concurrent with civil war presented themselves to him in their most awful consequences. He saw with his usual keen-sightedness all the woes that were awaiting Rome : thousands and thousands of widows and orphans prostrated before him, and supplicating him to avert the catastrophe. His conscience stung him, but only for a moment. High above the voice of conscience, of widows and orphans, rose the voice of his relentless *ambition*—it drowned all the rest. Ambition is a

violent torrent which carries everything before it: a fierce fire which devours all that is in its way: a blind power which forces a man onward to his doom.

While Cæsar was still reflecting on the subject, and clearing the path of his ambition in an off-hand way, another thought flashed on his mind, and for a moment, brave as he was, he turned slightly pale. The revolt of Catiline irresistibly came before him. All the bloodshed and disasters that the nation suffered were too fresh to be forgotten by anybody, less so by a Cæsar. But all the dreadful havoc and sufferings that were the inevitable result of the revolt weighed little with him. Nevertheless, Cæsar paused. It was the appalling fate of Catiline that made Cæsar pause. It was that disgusting and disfigured head hanging on the wall of Rome that made the brave warrior wince. The rebel's head was meant to be a living lesson, a terrible warning for those who might take upon themselves to follow his example. But even this was disregarded, and so Rome's misery and Rome's disasters, and Catiline's disfigured and disgusting head, lost their power to check his ambition.

It is very strange how such moments shape all the future course of a man, but with Cæsar they were shaping the future course of the world. He was unconsciously settling the fate of nations; he was unconsciously dooming thousands and thousands of men to ruin and destruction while, in the same unconscious manner, he was preparing a glorious career for many who were to be soon caught in the fateful web of his scheming. We know what the history of the world was after Cæsar came to his decision, but we do not know what it might have been if he had taken a different course.

The moon was high when the General stepped out from

the door of his tent. Bright and beautiful she looked in the clear blue sky, with the calm stars twinkling in their depths, heedless of human passion. The picturesque view before him had a soothing effect upon his mind. Erect and placid he stood in the moonlight, a picture of comeliness and manliness. After a while his pleasing meditations were disturbed. A meteor flashed suddenly across the sky. Long and sweeping was the luminous track that indicated its course. The illumination was so intense that the General could see everything distinctly before his eyes. Then it vanished. Cæsar followed the meteor's flight with a keen eye and a smiling face. It meant good luck, he thought.

The grey dawn was just beginning, when suddenly the sounds of trumpets were heard in the camp near the Rubicon. The breeze of the morning was blowing gently in the face of the brave tall General standing on the most prominent hill of the camp. He was not alone now; round him could be seen his trusty and loyal officers; first and foremost among them was the figure of Antony. It was as Cæsar told him, he had not had much repose, but his love and devotion to Cæsar revived him as much as sleep. With their chief in their midst, there was only one expression on the faces of all the officers—that of confidence. With him they were always sure of victory; wherever he led them it was always to glory; why shouldn't it be so now, even against Rome? Rome was terrible only on account of her courageous officers and soldiers. Her bravest General and soldiers were there on that beautiful spot by the Rubicon; with them they could accomplish anything.

The moment the soldiers heard the well-known sound of the trumpets they at once jumped to their feet; sleep was pleasant to them, but devotion to their General was more pleasant still.

There was a little bustle in the camp, but besides this, which is inevitable in every military operation, there was nothing to indicate any confusion.

Calmly and quietly the tents were taken down and packed up. The disciplined and regulated movements bespoke at once the skill of the General and the obedience of the soldier. The dawn grew clearer and clearer. The soldiers were in their military ranks ready to march, and nothing lacked now but the order of the great man, which was not long in coming. On a noble steed, Cæsar was now seen riding from one spot to another inspecting the troops, and every time he approached a regiment, loud cheers were heard bursting forth from his loyal followers. With a smiling face and dignified expression he acknowledged their enthusiasm.

Having satisfied himself as to the proper order of the troops, Cæsar decided to give the word of command. The sunrise was just appearing, when the General, surrounded by his devoted officers, gave at last that word which made Rome, even at this distance, tremble : “ March, brave soldiers ! ” and on marched the columns to Rome. First and foremost, with his sword glittering in hand, rode the intrepid warrior, followed by his devoted soldiers. Reaching the little bridge of the brook, Cæsar halted for a second, and a sad smile parted his lips. It was the boundary between his province and the province of Rome. Only a step to reach the Roman territory, but what a step ! Jumping across the most dangerous chasms in the world could not have been deemed more mad in the eyes of Rome than crossing this insignificant little bridge. Cæsar’s horse, as if comprehending the gravity of that step, paused for an instant on the Gallian side, but Cæsar gave him no time. Dashing his spurs into the animal’s sides as he shouted “ Bravely

forward !” then in one frantic leap the noble steed cleared the bridge and was on Roman soil !

“I have crossed the Rubicon !” was the immortal phrase of Cæsar, and amid the cheers of the officers and the wild enthusiastic cries of soldiers, the General kept steadily forward. Standing on a little hill to watch the regiments cross the bridge, he was saluted with their polished spears and javelins as they marched stolidly on. He never stirred from his spot until the last soldier crossed the bridge and was on the Republic’s soil.

“The die is cast,” murmured Cæsar to himself as he wheeled his horse from the little plateau. “The die is cast. The Rubicon is crossed, and the worse must come to the worst. Rome declined to receive me as a candidate, now she must take me as a conqueror. This is not the first time the Romans have accorded me this honour, and I hope it will not be the last. Pompey declined to share the government with me ; and now it is my turn to decline sharing it with him. Rome must see Cæsar either dead or a conqueror.”

Catiline’s affair, though still fresh in his mind, had no effect whatever on his nerves now. Once his resolution was taken, it was like the decree of Fate. His face beaming with delight and his eyes dancing, he cried “Onward, brave Mithridatis,” to his noble steed, patting him on the mane. “You have carried me safely on through many a danger and battle ; you will do so this time as well, good friend. Now is the time to avenge your namesake and add to the glory of your master,” and so saying he spurred the noble creature, who passed the columns one after another with the velocity of wind.

CHAPTER VIII.

NOTHING SUCCEEDS LIKE SUCCESS.

WITH his eagle-eye surveying the whole army as it moved on, Cæsar took his place in the centre. His plan was to reach Rome in as short a time as possible. He could gain nothing by delay ; his opponents might gain everything. Bent on giving his enemies no advantage whatever, he pushed diligently on. The officers and soldiers were as eager as the General to make long and forced marches. Despite all their fatigue, the army, with their General at their head, strained every nerve and muscle until within an astonishingly short period they found themselves not very far from the gates of Rome.

Bad news travels fast. As he was still on his way towards the Capitol, messenger after messenger had announced the approach of the rebel, as they then called him. Rome was at once thrown into the utmost consternation. Men were seen here and there spreading the alarming news. Others were sitting in groups, discussing the subject with sad faces. Nothing was heard in the streets of Rome save the story of Cæsar and his army. Vague rumours of all kinds were flying about the city, and the most contradictory statements were made in the most confused manner.

To a keen observer it was quite evident that the Republic was fast decaying. In the good old days of Rome every citizen would have been armed and every effort would have been exerted. Romans would have preferred to perish to the last man rather

than allow an ambitious leader to humble the proudest city, and insult the most renowned nation that ever existed on the face of the earth. Instead of these manly efforts, the citizens spent the precious days in fruitless discussion and impotent protests.

The last march was made, and before the golden rays of the sun had faded away from the neighbouring hills, the tents of the army were pitched in a beautiful spot. Rome was at last in sight. In the starlit night, on the highest hill near the camp, stood Cæsar looking eagerly on. The night made the Capitol look more striking. Innumerable luminous points in the distance indicated the immensity of the city. Not a nerve trembled in Cæsar's body. His dogged determination was evident. Like one who felt that he was already the master of the city, he looked victorious and proud.

Pompey, with the full confidence which was the result of a long term of ruling, delayed making the necessary preparations until the last moment. His everlasting delusion was, that whenever he required troops he had only to stamp with his foot, and legions would at once appear to his assistance, but when he required troops and did stamp no soldiers appeared. The ground proved, as Brutus had already predicted to him, obstinate and faithless, and when the hour of danger came, he found himself with only a handful of men, and almost defenceless.

With misfortune, the latent energy of Pompey was aroused. His great martial spirit rose to its height. Come out of it what might he determined to meet his opponent and offer him battle. He preferred to die sword in hand rather than flee ignominiously. To the last moment he still hoped that Rome

would yet rise like one man and avenge this insult, but, like a paralysed giant, the Capitol lay prostrate and powerless.

In one of the great palaces of Rome sat Pompey, grave and thoughtful. He had now left his villa ; in fact, he had left it some time before and repaired to the Capitol. Round him were the most influential members of the Senate. Time was pressing ; there was not a single moment to lose. The enemy was at the gates ; his white tents could be seen from the prominent hills.

Pompey looked sad, but not despondent. With his brows knit and his face thoughtful, he appeared nobler in misfortune than in prosperity. Among the assembly could be discerned the pale face of Brutus, paler in the lamplight than ever. The silence that reigned was ominous ; but at last its spell was broken and the discussion began. Hotter and hotter it grew. Pompey was still determined to remain and risk a battle ; his friends were trying all they could to dissuade him.

Not until the last spark of hope was extinguished did he shew any signs of relenting ; and even then not until Brutus, kneeling at his feet, earnestly entreated him to quit Rome for Rome's sake, did the General yield to the plan of his friends. If he should fall into Cæsar's hands, they represented to him, the fate of Rome was settled ; but if he quitted the city and began levying soldiers in another part of the Roman dominion, then there would be time for thousands to flock to him, and he could deal the intruder the fatal blow.

In the grey dawn of the following day, while Cæsar was making the necessary preparations to enter the Capitol, a small party of men on horseback were seen winding their way towards the western gate of the city. The features of the head of the party could scarcely be taken to be those of

Pompey. That night of mortification made him look several years older than he really was. On moved the party in the grey, indistinct light; the hoofs of the horses sounded with a metallic ring on the pavement in the still hours of the morning. Not a soul was up at that early hour. Rome, with all her grandeur and greatness, was buried in the stillness of sleep, to awaken to the light of a startling day. Not a single horseman of the party turned his head to look about; everyone was busy with his own thoughts. An indescribable sense of mortification was gnawing into their hearts and minds, and but for the hope that still lingered within them, they would have resorted to the old Roman cure of despair, and every man have fallen upon his sword.

Just as Pompey got to the gate of the city he reined in his horse, and for a moment gazed at the scene. All that immense city, with all her power and wealth and greatness, was to fall, after a few moments, a prize into the hands of his greatest enemy! A long sigh bespoke the bitter feelings that were galling his soul. Still, trusting that one day the Capitol might fall again to his lot, he dashed his spurs into the sides of his horse and quitted the mistress of the world for ever!

The sun was half way to its meridian when Julius Cæsar, mounted on his noble steed, with his drawn sword in his hand, arrived at last at the gates of Rome. With his keen military eyes, he had seen long before that no hostile preparations had been made against him. Everything indicated peace, or rather submission. Cæsar, intrepid and resolute in war, was always generous and magnanimous in peace. With his clear sharp voice, he at once ordered his army to deploy from battle array into that of Roman ranks coming back from a foreign victory,

exhorting them at the same time to shew the greatest deference to the feelings of the citizens and the laws of the Capitol.

No sooner did he approach the victory arch than the Senators, with wreaths in their hands, appeared to meet him, and pay their homage. His magnanimity now displayed itself more than ever. With his sword glittering in his hand, he ordered his regiments to salute them, and the order was at once obeyed. This generous act relieved the Senators, and changed their position from that of conquered into that of conquerors.

As he rode gallantly on Cæsar was saluted by the people on every side. Ladies came with beautiful bouquets of flowers and scattered them on his path. Citizens left their work and came to witness the entrance of this intrepid man. The roads were lined everywhere with crowds, who struggled forward to take a look at him. The roofs of houses and the windows were crowded with people, who eagerly looked on at the great man as he passed by. National songs were heard everywhere, cheers burst out in all directions. It looked like a great festival day in Rome. Excitement intoxicated everybody. From rank to rank shouts ran like magic. For the first time in the history of the Republic the proud Capitol was gracefully and magnanimously conquered by one of her ablest and greatest leaders. Rome delighted in the delusion that she was celebrating her victories over foreign nations, forgetting that she was really celebrating the victory of Julius Cæsar over her proud self.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE JAWS OF DEATH.

ON the morning of a gloomy wintry day a grey-headed man was led through the streets of Alexandria by a small regiment of soldiers. His head was bent down upon his chest, and his white beard fluttered in the wind. With bent brows and anxious face, he walked with tremulous and infirm steps, leaning on a staff which shook beneath his weight.

The band of soldiers that guarded him walked stolidly on. The officer, with a drawn sword, marching by the side of his regiment, looked gay and unconcerned. The people hurried to their doors and windows to take a look at the procession as it passed by, but no sooner had they recognised the man than they sadly went back with tears in their eyes and grief in their hearts. Such processions were of daily occurrence in Alexandria, and the people knew but too well what they meant. The quiet way in which it was conducted suggested something in the shape of a funeral of a living man: it was indeed the funeral of the poor old man Dion, led to execution.

The day grew more and more gloomy, and the band marched more and more stolidly, until they arrived at a large square piece of ground in the very midst of the city, where the soldiers halted. The square was crowded with Alexandrians who had the courage to come and witness the sad end of the popular old man. They all turned their eyes

upon him as he was led to the centre of the square. His short imprisonment had wrought sad changes in his grand features ; but, in spite of all these signs of a time spent in misery and torture, he still had a dignified and noble bearing as in the days of old.

The eyes of the crowd were all filled with tears as the venerable philosopher turned his soft eyes towards them, and a low, half-suppressed murmur arose. The clouds gathered darker and darker in the frowning sky. Heaven itself seemed to look down with wrath and indignation at the work of iniquity which was prepared for the good and innocent. The silence of death was hanging over all who were there.

At last a strong man appeared in the centre of the space with a glittering sword in hand. His arms were bare to the shoulder, revealing knotted muscles ; his eyes, which were generally of a wild, ferocious look, were pathetically grave, and his face showed with what reluctance he was undertaking the performance of his repulsive duty.

An officer with a drawn sword stepped forward, and ordered the condemned to walk into the centre of the group. Dion obeyed. A wave of groans rose from the crowd, but was soon suppressed by the stern and threatening look of the soldiery.

"Have you any request to make before you are executed?" asked the officer.

"I desire to speak to the people," answered Dion firmly.

"My orders are to the contrary ; that cannot be."

"Even this is forbidden?"

"Even this is forbidden," echoed the officer.

"May heaven have mercy upon this unfortunate country!"

ejaculated Dion, with hands uplifted to the sky in a supplicating attitude.

“No more of this, my dear sir. Offer your neck humbly to the sword,” said the officer with indifference.

As Dion was preparing himself to receive the fatal blow from the hand of his executioner, the eyes of the crowd turned aside from the horrible sight; as they did so, they could perceive in the near distance a few horsemen galloping towards them at full speed. The dust rose up from the ground in a little cloud, which hid for a few moments both horses and horsemen.

The little party dashed on until they arrived at the spot. A young man heading them pushed forward his excited horse, and would have run down everybody before him, had not the people made a path for him as he flew along. He never reined horse until he was quite close to the condemned and the executioner. His party followed in the path which the young man had made, and suddenly stopped where he did.

The blood was streaking profusely from the side of the youth's horse, and the breath steamed from his nostrils. He had arrived just at the moment when the executioner was lifting up his arm to deal the fatal stroke.

“Hold on! hold on!” thundered the young man.

The executioner, who had been much intent upon his work during the few last moments, had not noticed the little cavalcade that had just arrived, and his hand remained uplifted to give the fatal blow.

“Scoundrel!” shrieked the young man in an exasperated tone. “Scoundrel! take away that weapon, or by heaven both weapon and hand shall fall down to the ground by a

stronger arm than yours." So saying, the young man drew his sword and threw himself between the executioner and Dion.

There was hushed excitement. All eyes turned towards this messenger of heaven.

"Who dares interrupt the executioner of her Majesty?" interrogated the officer, who stepped forward with a stern look.

"I do," answered the youth, still holding his sword in his right hand.

"Beware how you address the officer of her Majesty. Learn that the head will sometimes answer for the fault of the tongue, my rash youngster."

"It is as well for the officer of her Majesty to learn the lessons he takes upon himself to teach others, and learn them well, for sooner or later heads *will* surely answer for the faults of the tongue and the faults of the hand."

"Beware again, rude fellow, how you speak to her Majesty's captain of the guards. To hear you speak, one would think you a man of authority. One word more and my hand will save justice the trouble of ordering your execution," the officer haughtily rejoined.

"Learn how to speak to the captain of his Majesty's guard; one word more of your impertinence and my sword will pierce your bulky frame. It has been dyed with nobler blood than yours. You speak of authority? *This is my authority*," and drawing a parchment from his pocket he handed it sternly to the officer.

A moment later and the latter turned deadly pale; the twitching of his lips and the working of his facial muscles showed plainly the mortification of his soul.

"This is signed by Pothinus and Ashillas," ejaculated at last the exasperated officer.

"Pothinus and Ashillas are the King's guardians, and in their name I demand that Dion shall be delivered into my hands."

"Neither the King nor his guardians' orders pass here; you should try them somewhere else."

"The King's orders should pass everywhere, and before trying them somewhere else I prefer to try them here first."

"The long and the short of it is that you shall not have the condemned, no matter whatever orders you carry with you, and now begone and inform your masters."

"Shame upon my princely blood if I leave this spot without fulfilling the charge entrusted to me, and you shall find the King's orders obeyed here as everywhere."

"Guards!" shouted the officer to his soldiers.

"Guards!" thundered the young man to his followers, and with the rapidity of lightning plunged his sword into the heart of his opponent, who fell lifeless to the ground.

"For your King and country!" cried the brave young officer, addressing his followers, as swords were drawn by the Queen's guards to assault the little party. "Victory is to the right, but above all, victory is to the brave."

Twenty swords were at once drawn from their scabbards, and the brave little party stood undaunted before the regiment that hurried to the attack.

The crowd now ran in confusion in every direction as the combatants measured swords. The Queen's body-guards were over fifty in number. For a few moments nothing was heard or seen but the clash of swords, and their bright

surfaces shining in the dim day, while the shrieks of the wounded and the groans of the dying were heard above the tumult of the struggle.

"Heaven help the rescuers and protect the people," murmured many a voice from the crowd as they looked anxiously on from a distance.

"Heaven help and protect those who help and protect themselves!" thundered a man from the crowd as he drew a sharp dagger from his side, and was on the point of rushing into the terrible *mêlée*.

"Take care how you act," remarked one of the bystanders, "if you escape from their swords, the Queen will get you hung afterwards at her leisure."

"We have lost property, honour, and liberty, what else do we care for?" answered the man, still handling his weapon fiercely in his hand. "Down with the tyrants! down with the Queen's guards! Those who are for their King and country let them follow me," and so saying he brandished his dagger once more and rushed furiously headlong into the very midst of the combatants.

It is strange what the example of one man, in such circumstances, will sometimes do. The people who were for decades accustomed to oppression and servitude, stood still at first looking at the combatants without even having the courage to interfere in any way, but now that one of their number had the rashness to meddle, it seemed as if a stimulus had been applied to their latent energy, and with the strange tendency of a mob to move one way or other, they rushed in after the man, following his example with mad fury.

Five minutes later, those who survived of the Queen's guards were seen flying away like frantic creatures. To

their astonishment the storm, which was for a long time brewing in the atmosphere, began to burst. Amid the cheers of the multitude and the songs of the rescuers, the old philosopher was carried back home on the arms of the crowd.

CHAPTER X.

THE STORMY NIGHT.

IN the same State-saloon, where we first made the acquaintance of her Majesty, sat Cleopatra, reclining on a velvet sofa, supported by soft velvet cushions. She wore a black dress which gave more effect, by its contrast, to her charming fair skin. Her hair was negligently thrown behind her back, which negligence gave more beauty to its black colour and curly texture. It was now late in the evening, and, contrary to custom, the saloon was dimly lit with a few lamps which gave rather a ghastly pale light. Her black eyes looked even blacker in the dim room. Events which had passed between the first time we made acquaintance with her and the present moment had left traces of worry on her face. The roses on her cheeks had faded a little, and her big lustrous eyes were surrounded by a faint dark circle—always a sign of nervous tension. The expression of her countenance was sad, but nevertheless poetic; her lips alone retained the original rosy tint, the more charming when compared with the delicately pale colour of the face and her dark dress.

But every change, of whatever nature it might be, seemed to contribute to the beauty of the Queen or the queen of beauty. If she lost the charming colour of the rose she now gained the transparent soft colour of jasmin. Her sadness seemed to give to her features an unusual expression of tenderness and benevolence.

The storm was raging far and wide outside. It was one of those tempests which burst with amazing suddenness and fury. The rain dashed in torrents against the windows. The wind moaned and sobbed like a spirit in pain and anger. The night was pitch dark. The wild sea close by was raging, and its roar rose even higher than the howling of the wind and the moaning of the trees.

In the dim uncertain light could be distinguished two personages sitting in a respectful attitude before the Queen. Opposite her on a plain silver chair sat a young lady in the flower of her life. She was scarcely twenty years of age, with dark hair and eyes, and drooping lashes. Her face was round, with a little dimple on the chin. Her stature was tall and her general bearing proud and dignified. But for the respectful attitude she maintained before Cleopatra it was somewhat difficult to say which of the two young ladies was the Queen. This lady was Iras, Cleopatra's maid of honour.

Between the two ladies, and at a little distance from them, on a plain olive-wood chair sat a man past the middle age of life. His hair was sprinkled with grey, and the unkind hand of time had already written indelible marks on his face. He was of middle size with small green eyes which did not speak much in his favour. The expression of his face was of a mixture of dulness, cunning, and servility. A smile half wicked and half pleasant displayed itself on his face. His nose was half aquiline, half retroussé. His general bearing made him look like a malleable piece of metal which could be turned into any shape the smith desired.

The Queen, in spite of her affected calmness and serenity, was ill at ease. The heaving of her breast and the restlessness of her eyes, now wandering, now fixed, as if on a vague

distant object, indicated that she was revolving some problems of a serious nature in her mind. On raged the fierce storm outside, but another storm of a fiercer nature was raging in her brain. Three times the thunder-like sounds of the raging sea were heard high and loud, and three times the beautiful Queen was heard to give a gentle sigh.

At last there was a lull in the storm, and the silence seemed the more solemn when contrasted with the previous violence. The moment the ominous lull began, Venus stopped sighing, and her gentle breast stopped heaving. Both storm and Queen seemed to have had a silent agreement to give a short truce to those around them.

"Have you ever noticed," said Cleopatra, at last breaking the silence, "that this stormy night closely resembles that after which those curs of Alexandrians rose against our illustrious sire, of blessed memory, and compelled him with their insolence to abdicate for the time being? Those dogs of Alexandrians—death plague their lives as it has been doing all along—become mighty dangerous under certain exciting circumstances, and are apt to bite and are not easily brought back to their senses unless they are sharply cudgelled. Well," resumed her Majesty after a short pause, "they have been so well cudgelled that it is not likely they will care to try the same game again."

"I remember the dreadful storm your Majesty refers to," said Iras, smiling bitterly, "but it is not to be compared with this; methinks this storm is more severe, but perhaps fresh storms are more impressive than old ones."

"Not so with me, dear Iras," resumed the Queen, "the memory of that night with what followed it are as fresh in my mind as ever. I was young and thoughtless then, but never-

theless the events are indelible on my brain. I still remember how on that night our sire paced this very saloon up and down, and how, even amidst danger, he never flinched from his principle which he retained to the very end of his career. 'Petitions or no petitions,' said he, 'I will not yield to the impertinence of those idiots. Privileges! they shall have none. My grandsire conquered Egypt by the sword and by the sword we will retain it; the howling of those curs will never frighten the descendant of Alexander's general. Fie!' continued he in a fit of anger as he kept pacing this very saloon, 'shame on kings who yield an inch to their subjects; it is always a sign of weakness. A few princes swinging on the gallows to-morrow will settle the whole business; no, Ptolemy will not yield;' and the swinging system," continued her Majesty, explaining matters, "would *have* settled the business, but our sire's officers were too slow for it; half an hour's delay spoiled the whole affair. Half an hour's delay cost our sire a loss of two years' reign in his kingdom, with a voyage to Rome and heaps of gold, but the two great men of Rome emulated one another in their desire to do him service, and the Senate reinstated him at last on his throne."

Having indulged in these interesting reminiscences, the Queen looked anxiously into Apollodorus's face, her trusted secretary—for such was the man already described—and after a doubtful pause asked, "What is the time now?"

"Only the second quarter of the night, your Majesty."

"Then there is plenty of time yet; they are not late." And the Queen reclined once more on the sofa.

"Isn't it strange," remarked Iras, taking up the Queen's thread of thought, "isn't it remarkable, that the two great

men of Rome, who served our illustrious late King, were then the best of friends, and are now at loggerheads? It is rumoured that Cæsar entered Rome gloriously, and Pompey fled to levy troops; they say a decisive battle will take place before long, and whoever comes out victorious will be the master of the world."

"What ambitious creatures these Romans are!" answered the Queen. "The whole world is not enough for two of them; we doubt whether it will be enough even for one; they seem to be as fond of glory as of gold. Cæsar extorted from our late sire immense sums of money to give him a helping hand in the Senate, and when he left Rome for Gallia, Pompey took up the job. He was then all powerful and his influence was more than sufficient, and he carried his point so well that our sire was grateful for his aid, notwithstanding the incredible sums he gave him. Our house is indebted to both of them, and as both applied now simultaneously to our crown for help, it was promised to both of them, so that whoever comes out victorious will not be offended; this is gratitude and policy at the same time," went on the Queen, smiling sarcastically, "these Romans are restless creatures; the world is never at peace unless they fight among themselves. I should like to see this game going on a good long while between Pompey and Cæsar. I shall then be left in peace to transact my own business."

"It will be transacted soon enough for that," rejoined Apollodorus, more for the sake of saying something than for the sense of what he said.

"There is some sense in what you say, Apollodorus."

"Naturally," answered the trusted secretary, wittily, "or else I won't be understood."

"You may turn out to be a great wit one of these days," remarked the Queen good-naturedly.

"I trust so," answered Apollodorus humbly, not daring to risk another witty remark lest it should be insipid.

Again the storm resumed its violent work outside. The wind changed into a hurricane, which broke off the boughs of trees. The rain changed into hail. The waves of the Mediterranean, as if feeling the lashes of the hurricane, worked themselves up into fury, and on dashed the billows against the adjacent rockwalls with such violence that the noise was almost deafening; the spray carried by the wind came in scud against the walls of the palace. The lightning flashed, and thunder seemed to shake the very foundation of the royal abode.

The Queen, still reclining on the velvet cushions, was speechless. Her eyes still retained the expression of looking at a distant object. A frown gathered from time to time on her brow. Her bosom began again its gentle heaving and a sigh from her lips broke the dead silence.

"Have you taken the necessary precautions, Apollodorus?" asked the Queen, after a short pause.

"Everything is arranged as could be desired, madam," answered the secretary.

The way the question was put and answered would lead one to imagine that the arrangement referred to was one of a benevolent kind to some human being, but such projects as the present one were so common in the court of Cleopatra, that the blackest crime could be arranged and transacted with the same ease and peace of conscience which the most philanthropic object could inspire. Topics of a pleasant nature could

be indulged in within the palace while the most criminal preparations were being made for dreadful work outside.

"The Alexandrians will have a startling surprise by the dawn of the day," continued Apollodorus with a sinister smile.

"That will be the answer to their impertinent petitions," said Iras in a calm manner which made of her a worthy maid of honour to her royal mistress. "They shall discover by the pale light of the morning that their petition has been turned into beautiful swinging hieroglyphics which they can very well understand."

"It will be to their cost if they don't," remarked Cleopatra, "there will always be room enough on the walls for more skulls; that will put a stop to these annoyingly insolent petitions of theirs. They talk—impudent creatures—about the prerogatives of the people! Plague take the people and their prerogatives! What is the use of kings and queens in a country, when their subjects begin to dictate to them what should be done? I have always looked upon it as an insult to royal personages to receive such petitions. This is how our late sire treated the subject, too; every time those hounds of Alexandrians dared to send him a petition they always received a convincing answer from the gallows. These Egyptian princes are perfect idiots when alive, but once they swing on the gallows they suddenly become wise men—death makes them so. When people are deprived of life they are deprived of nonsense, when wisdom steps in to fill the gap. What is the time, Apollodorus?" asked her Majesty, abruptly, "we are beginning to feel impatient at the delay."

Apollodorus left the saloon for a minute and then appeared

again. "The sand hour-glass," said he, "has been inverted six times since dusk, it is midnight now."

"Well, there are two hours more," said Iras, in her fascinating manner. "In two hours we can put the whole kingdom into confusion : there is plenty of time."

"Remember that half-an-hour was quite enough to ruin Ptolemy Auletes. Half-an-hour may be enough to ruin his daughter. I don't like to have any delay in such emergencies. I remember he had the same confidence of success which we now have. I quite recollect how, after walking restlessly in this saloon for a few moments, he at last ordered his violin to be brought, and how he skilfully touched the strings, braving danger herself—the Ptolemies were ever daring and brave. However, I differ a little from my father's views, and prefer to touch my harp when no political emergency is at hand ; but he was a man and could handle his sword. I wish," continued she, looking at the relics over the entrance door, "I wish I had been born a man, but my beloved brother informed me once that it was more fascinating to be a queen. Well, I won't differ from him ; from to-morrow morning there will be no difference of opinions between us, there will be then perfect mutual understanding, our differences regarding our wall decorations and the late affair of Dion and other similar trifles will come to an end after a few hours." And with a meaning bitter smile on her face she listened to the raging storm which was still increasing in violence.

CHAPTER XI.

POINTED QUESTIONS.

ALEXANDRIA, with all her hundreds of thousands, was buried in sleep and darkness. Not a single sound broke the silence except the howling wind and the raging sea. A black pall of darkness covered the whole city.

But there was a light in a small palace some respectable distance from the royal abode. One of its rooms had a guarded lamp behind thick shutters. The room was beautifully decorated and gorgeously furnished. In the midst stood a large round table with a costly cashmere cover, at which sat two men opposite each other. The one was nearly fifty years of age, tall, well built, and of a strong muscular frame. His hair, despite his age, still retained the bright dark colour common in hot climates. His eyes were also dark but small, and there was in them a mixed look of amiability and treachery, each of which predominated in its turn, just as circumstances suggested ;—to-night the former element was more prominent.

The other was about eight years his senior, somewhat less tall, and his hair and beard were sprinkled with silvery threads. His eyes were big and bright, and the way he gave himself up to meditation impressed one with the idea that he was a planning, scheming man. While the strength of the former was in his arm, that of the latter was in his brain. Between the two men sat a youth of tender age. He looked a

little pale and agitated, but nevertheless he could command himself. He had a dignified and noble bearing.

At a little distance from the table stood a man in the full vigour of manhood, with a contracted face and trembling limbs—a picture of helpless despair.

“Your life is held by a thin spider thread, my dear fellow. Spider threads, you know, easily give way, and consequently your life gives way too.”

These words were addressed by the grey-haired man to the one who was tremblingly standing by.

“What would you have with me?” asked the man, trembling all the more.

“Nothing very difficult; only a few words to clear your message in this stormy dark night.”

“I have already informed you that my message is a harmless one, and for the service of my superiors.”

“Heaven bless you and your superiors!” went on the elder man in his sarcastic way. “Your message is a harmless one, you say. Look me straight in the face, Aganimidis.”

The man tried to do so, but his eyes fell at once to the ground.

“Aganimidis,” said the other man, looking at him hard in the face, “I do not know so much about spiders and their threads as my noble friend, but I know something better. I shall flay every piece of your skin, cover your body with honey, and put you before a hive of furious bees. Do you understand me, sir?”

Aganimidis, who was well acquainted with this method, grew ghastly pale. He brought his right hand over his heart as if to still its palpitation, while he pressed the left against his side.

"I am not a man of words," went on the tall muscular man, "I make more use of my hand than my tongue."

"I have nothing to communicate," gasped out the poor man, almost fainting under the piercing eyes of his interrogators.

"Liar!" thundered the man of the dark hair again. "Dare you mock us in our faces while death is opening its jaws to swallow us? One word more of such lies and my sword will pierce your cowardly figure." Then turning to his friend sitting opposite him, "Pothinus," said he, "read out what is in that parchment before you."

"We would like to see first whether he won't confess all himself, Ashillas," said Pothinus. Then turning to Aganimidis. "Miserable fellow," said he, "we are in possession of trustworthy information that you are charged with a criminal message of the vilest and blackest character possible. Confess, or before the dawn of another day your face, pale now as death, will be paler *in* death."

"What is the criminal mission with which I am charged?" said Aganimidis, trying to avoid betraying the emotions which were only too manifest.

"This is exactly what we want to know," said Pothinus smilingly.

"They know nothing as yet," murmured Aganimidis to himself, "and they shall never know."

"How do you know, then, that I am charged with a criminal mission," answered the man, taking courage at their apparent ignorance.

"You are brought here to be interrogated and not to interrogate," said Pothinus sternly. "Confess before it is too late."

The silence that ensued was rather ominous; the accused, being in that doubtful state, not knowing whether the accusers were really in possession of information or not, tried to shield himself by silence.

"Miserable wretch!" thundered again Ashillas with his strong voice, "the lives of three men are jeopardised, and you are still trying to cover your employers!"

A thunderbolt exploding at the feet of the criminal could not have produced a more severe shock upon him than did these words. There was not a shadow of doubt now that the interrogators were in possession of some secret intelligence from the palace revealing the whole plot.

"You won't confess?" resumed Ashillas. "I know how to persuade you. Halloo! who stands there?" at the summons of which a servant at once appeared.

"Bring the implements," said Ashillas to the latter.

The implements required, though not specified by the master, were perfectly understood by his follower. A moment later and the servant appeared with the apparatus of different kinds—implements for separating the limbs, for rolling the limbs, bruising, breaking, and, if necessary, crushing them: manacles of different shapes for hands and fingers, pressing them until the blood sprang out from their surfaces; others to screw the chest and stomach against the back, and the last but not the least one was a sharp dagger to dispatch the sufferer as a last resort if it was deemed advisable so to do.

Aganimidis was perfectly acquainted with all these implements of torture, as he had seen them but too often doing good service in the torture-room of his royal mistress, where things were conducted on a much larger scale. At the sight

of them his blood ran icy cold in his veins, his sweat began to fall down on the floor drop by drop, his eyes were lustreless, and his breathing deep and irregular ; his limbs twitched, and his heart beat quick and fast as if trying to rupture its walls.

Here was a man who for years used to watch with infinite amusement and satisfaction the exquisite suffering of thousands of innocent and brave men in that infernal torture-room of the Queen ; and when his turn came, like all people devoid of honour and humanity, he was a perfect coward, a trembling slave to fear.

"For heaven's sake, spare my life," ejaculated the miserable wretch, as he fell on his knees.

"Will you confess all, then ?" asked Ashillas with a bitter smile.

"On one condition."

"Which ?"

"That my life will be spared."

Both Ashillas and Pothinus looked towards the young man at the head of the table, who was watching the affair with desperate calmness. Without saying a single word, he simply nodded his head in the affirmative.

"Granted," said Pothinus, "but on one condition."

"What ?"

"That you will confess all."

"All," ejaculated the trembling coward.

"Then be brief," rejoined Ashillas, "we have not a single moment to lose. We have already taken the necessary precautions, but we must have sufficient time to carry out our own plans before the break of day."

"I feel faint," cried feebly the unhappy man, still kneeling

before his accusers, and trembling all the more at the sight of the apparatus, which were still facing him.

Ashillas touched a silver bell on the table before him. "Bring some wine to the man," he said to the servant who appeared at the door. The valet brought a goblet, which the culprit gulped in one draught. Revived with the stimulant, he felt himself a little stronger.

"Stand up, and confess all; we have no time to lose, I repeat," resumed Ashillas.

"It was on a moonlight evening," began Aganimidis, still in the kneeling posture, not availing himself of the favour. "It was on a moonlight evening that I was ordered to receive secret instructions from the Queen. When I entered the room her Majesty looked rather stern and reflective. 'Aganimidis,' said she to me, 'you are one of my most trusted favourites.' 'I am your most humble servant, I am always ready to shed my blood in your Majesty's service,' answered I. 'Very well, very well,' she remarked, smilingly, 'and your sincerity will soon be put to the test, Aganimidis. I am now much concerned about the happiness and well-being of my subjects. I am entrusted with the welfare of millions of people, and I must see them well and justly governed. Three persons are in the way of my good and benevolent intentions, and they must be removed. You know who I mean, Aganimidis. They share the government with me, and they block every good intention to my beloved people. When the government is divided between so many people nothing can be done. You are a Roman, and one of those who were appointed to the guard of our late sire after his return from Rome. You have always been loyal to him, you will always be loyal to his daughter. These three persons must be removed, I repeat.

I have already given my orders to my new captain of guards; you will confer with him regarding the necessary precautions for a successful issue. These are your instructions,' ended her Majesty, 'and the Queen knows very well how to reward her honest and faithful servants,' and, extending her hand to me, I kissed it, and our interview came to an end.

"Repairing to the captain of guards, the names of the three men were given me, and it would be superfluous to mention them. A stormy night was selected as the best time to transact the business. The task allotted to me was to secure the person at the head of the Civil Administration, while the captain himself was to secure the head of the Military Department; the third illustrious personage was to be secured shortly after. The guards of her Majesty were to be held in readiness at once, where the captain and myself were to repair and receive our last instructions from the Queen. Everything was to have taken place before dawn. What transpired as I was repairing to the palace I need not say, for you know it better than myself. You wanted me to be brief," ended Aganimidis, in a gasping voice, "and brief I have been in my story."

Again the little silver bell was touched. "What is the time?" asked Ashillas from his servant.

"The sand-hour has been inverted nine times after sunset; it is two hours after midnight."

"How goes the storm, man?"

"Clearing rapidly, my lord."

The servant withdrew, after which there was a dead silence. The young man, who never uttered a single word during the whole interrogation, looked grave and thoughtful. He was in one of those anxious moments when the life of a man hangs

in the balance. His face turned alternately pale and flushed, and his eyes bright and sombre, according to the agitations that were raging within. The tempest had roared and abated, the rain had fallen in heavy showers, the hail dashed with great violence, and the wind hissed and moaned; but of all that the young man was unmindful. The darkness of his heart left no room for him to meditate on the darkness without, and the mental storm that was gathering in his brain manifested itself in a dark cloud over his brow.

At last he quitted his seat, and moved to the window. Opening the shutters, he looked into the immense dark space without. The storm had already abated, white clouds were seen rapidly traversing the sky, the moon appeared occasionally from between the clouds, pale and melancholy, like the face of the young man; the wind, still cold and chilly, was pleasant to his flushed face. The sea alone still swelled under the storm, and dashed its waves against the sandy rocks with thunderous explosions.

CHAPTER XII.

THE UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

THE Queen, despite her calmness and strength of mind, began to feel impatient.

"I wish this stupid of an Aganimidis would come," at last remarked her Majesty, "it is the last quarter of the night now. In such emergencies time is to be counted not only by hours but by minutes. I am tired of this uncertain state of things."

"Patience, madam," answered her maid of honour, "the errors of the world are more on the side of haste than that of deliberation. The storm is clearing up, and they cannot but make their appearance now."

"In such decisive moments the faults of the world are more on the side of wavering and inactivity. One moment is enough to destroy all. It is a case of life and death; if you don't conquer, the only alternative is to be conquered."

"Hush! I hear something like steps coming from a distance."

"Have you remarked again," went on the Queen, not heeding the maid, "how similar this night is to that previous to the temporary dethronement of our sire? The storm began and abated about the same time as it did on that memorable period. There will be something more than dethronement to-night. Our sire was temporarily suspended from the throne, but to-night folks will be suspended, but up in the air."

"And such cold air!" remarked Apollodorus sarcastically.

"Cold or warm it signifies little, provided the suspension is certain," was the Queen's reply.

"They come! they come!" cried again Iras with her musical voice; "don't you hear the jingle of their swords?" and, dashing to the window, she opened it with her white hands, and, to her immense satisfaction, she could see clearly in the intermittent moonlight figures moving towards the palace in regular military order.

"They are more than half-an-hour late," said Cleopatra. "I don't like these half-hour delays; they are of a bad omen to sovereigns."

"They shall be of a good omen this time, madam; your Majesty always ridiculed superstition."

"Quite so, and delay too."

"Hark! they mount the steps!" cried Iras, her face beaming.

"Our captain of guards shall be delayed promotion half-a-year for this half-hour's delay. When royal personages wait hours for their subjects, the latter in their turn must wait years for promotion. I always find kindness spoils people; nothing is so good for this world as severity; this is why we are so strict and just with our subjects, and this is why they are so well disciplined and subdued. Kindness always spoils people, while severity always tends to correct them. Cleopatra shall be known to all posterity as the severe, just sovereign of Egypt, and our example will go far towards strengthening the prestige of our reigning family. We have no weaknesses; sovereigns ought always to reign with a hand of iron and a sceptre of fire."

As the Queen ended her political remarks there was a dead

silence. Nearer and nearer the steps sounded, and with every step a clink of a sword rang clearly in their ears. Nearer and nearer still came the steps, until they were heard in the corridor leading to the State saloon. Iras sprang to her feet to open the door, when, to the intense surprise and horror of all, the pale face and slim figure of the young King suddenly came to view, like the appearance of a ghost.

The moment the King entered the saloon the Queen uttered one of those terrible shrieks which utter bewilderment alone can produce. Her face turned at once deathly pale, and her eyes wandered in that vague manner which sudden disaster creates. She rose from her easy reclining posture as if touched by a strong electric current, and was quite at a loss how to account for the visit of the King. Had the plot failed? Had she been betrayed? Had the King come to apologise for his late unfriendly behaviour? Was it a net to capture the King? All these ideas flashed through her mind with the velocity of lightning.

Heretofore she had never failed in any of her secret plots against princes and men of the highest rank. She looked upon herself as a goddess, and her plans had succeeded so grandly that she was already beginning to think that there was something divine about her. The honour she exacted from her subjects was similar to that due to the gods. This was the first rude shock she had received to remind her that after all she was but a mortal. For a moment she felt paralysed in mind and body, but it was only for a moment. Her proud nature and self-command gained the victory. In a few seconds she was alert and brave.

The King, though raging with indignation, nevertheless stepped gently and smilingly into the saloon. But for the

paleness of his face, nothing extraordinary could be noticed about him. Though inexperienced, he was nevertheless full of cunning and natural deceit. His previous description might have given a wrong impression about him. He did not care in the least for the happiness of his subjects any more than his royal sister and consort ; but the well-being of the people is always a very plausible excuse to ambitious men who, under such pretexts, work their own ends in the world behind the screen of moral principle. Between the Queen and the King the unfortunate Egyptian nation was between two fires, but the fire of the latter was less destructive than that of the former. The young King was yet under the guardianship of Pothinus and Ashillas, who were the mortal enemies of his consort ; but his natural cunning made up for his tender years, and often he had it all his own way, in spite of every check and objection.

CHAPTER XIII.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

THE instant the King entered the royal saloon, both Iras and Apollodorus withdrew in fear, leaving the royal couple to their own conversation.

"May we ask your Majesty," began the Queen, after a moment's silence, "the reason why you favour us with a visit amid storms and hurricanes?"

"Can the storms and hurricanes prevent a devoted lover from the happy, happy moments that could be enjoyed beside the idol of his heart? Love, my darling, is stronger than all the elements of nature—it is even stronger than death itself."

At the hearing of the word "death" the Queen turned ashy pale, but she hid her emotion with the ease and art which woman alone can command. She threw at him one of those piercing glances which often enabled her to read motives; but the little King was calm, and this reassured her.

"You are my Queen, darling; but after all you are my wife, and rank ought never to step in between wife and husband, or brother and sister."

"Your devotion and attention to-night surpass all my expectation; I have been so accustomed to desertion and indifference that I am almost lost in astonishment at this late visit in such trying weather."

"You never encouraged me, sister, to be beside you; my devotion met nothing but indifference and cold reception."

Cleopatra looked again into his pale face to find out whether he was in earnest, but the face of the young King was an impenetrable mask.

“But you are exceedingly pale to-night,” remarked her Majesty, “is there anything wrong with you?”

“Pale!” answered the King, “I should think so; I have been frightened to death to-night.”

As he spoke Cleopatra stared wildly at him; the colour which by this time had returned to her cheeks faded away, and there was a slight tremor visible on her lips.

“Frightened to death?” she asked, with an astonishment more affected than real.

“Yes, darling; there was an attempt at my life to-night.”

“Indeed!” screamed the Queen, looking more and more bewildered, “and who dares lift his hand against his Sovereign?”

“Who else could it be but those treacherous guardians of mine? They have been lording it very haughtily of late. I am tired of their guardianship; I am suspicious of them. They want to despatch both of us, one after the other, and then seize the rein of government.”

There were signs of savage delight on the face of the Queen as she heard those words. Her beautiful colour resumed its usual brightness. Feeling that there was no suspicion whatever in the mind of Ptolemy, she regained her majestic air.

“Gods!” cried she affectedly, “do Pothinus and Ashillas dare to lift up their hands against the reigning family?”

“There is a dreadful conspiracy working against us to-night which has no ulterior object save that of exterminating our family, and I come in time to warn you if it is not too late.”

“The gods forbid!”

“The gods seem to have been on the neutral side lately ; they seem to have lost the habit of either bidding or forbidding, and I assure you if we do not concert measures of our own the gods will leave us to our own fate.”

The Queen lifted up her eyes and looked at her brother with something like admiration, and for a moment she wavered in the plan she had already laid for his destruction. She felt that in doing so she was depriving herself of the best support she could lean upon in her life. For the last few months she had closely watched the boy becoming a man, and the man developing into a veritable king. What was terror to her before turned now into safety. She repented in her heart of the wicked crime she had meditated, but it was too late.

“Speak, my dear Queen,” continued the young King somewhat impatiently. “I come here for protection and advice, have you none to give me ?”

“You shall have all our protection, but I see no danger at which you should be anxious,” answered the Queen, forgetting in her confusion that Ptolemy had already told her that an assault was made at him.

“Good heavens ! Attempts are made at the life of your brother by the hands of assassins and you see no danger ?”

Again Cleopatra lifted up her eyes to him, and this time her suspicions were aroused. There was something unusual in the impatient angry look of the young man, and the paleness of his colour did not contribute to make her mind easy. She felt she was on a quicksand, and she determined to tread warily.

“But who dared lift up his hand against the King of Egypt ?” asked Cleopatra.

“Must I tell your Majesty a second time that it is those treacherous guardians of mine—plague upon their lives!”

“But you don’t mean to say that you were attacked personally by them?”

“No, it was a hired assassin.”

“And who is this wretch?”

“It is that traitor Aganimidis.”

The Queen involuntarily winced under this blow, her eyes wandering wildly.

“Aganimidis!” she shrieked.

“Himself, madam—the scoundrel; but he confessed all.”

“Confessed!” she exclaimed, beside herself with rage and mortification.

“Most decidedly,” said the King quietly, feigning not to have paid any attention to her uneasiness. “Would you that such a crime should pass undiscovered?”

“No, no; but what did he confess?”

“That it was through the instigation of Pothinus and Ashillas.”

Cleopatra breathed again freely, and her frightened look passed away as if by magic. A glow of delight shone from her eyes, and her serene jasmine colour resumed its genuine beauty and attraction. “Brave Aganimidis! brave Aganimidis!” murmured she to herself, “he would rather die than betray his queen.”

“His head must pay for this black crime,” said the Queen, anxious to remove him, as the dead betray no secret.

“He must be pardoned, madam.”

“Pardoned! and after such a crime, impossible!”

“ He has been promised pardon, and pardon he shall receive. The word of honour of a king must be kept even in such circumstances.”

“ You pardon the wretch who made attempts at your life ! You are too dear to me to let the miserable creature thus escape.”

“ A thousand thanks, madam, a thousand thanks, but it was the bargain of his confession ; I promised him to spare his life and he promised to lay before me the whole plot ; he kept his word and I must keep mine.”

Again the colour faded away from the Queen's cheeks, and again a cloud gathered on her brow. Her feelings and colour swayed to and fro with the regularity of a pendulum ; no sooner was she reassured than a new blow rudely shook her belief in the sincerity of the King.

“ But if you want to visit your just anger on somebody, another man's head must answer for this black crime,” said the young King.

“ Whom do you mean ? ”

“ The captain of your guard.”

The captain of my guard !” echoed the Queen with much affected astonishment.

“ He has a most important part to play in this diabolical affair : he is also implicated in the plot against my life to-night.”

The Queen for the first time gave an involuntary start, and her powerful eyes lowered before those of Ptolemy.

“ And by whom was he instigated ? ”

“ It is always the same story ; Pothinus and Ashillas, madam.”

“ By the break of day they must swing on the gallows.”

“And the captain of the guard?”

“Well, you interceded with me for Aganimidis, I will intercede for the captain—life for life.”

“As you please, your Majesty,” answered the King, giving a wicked wink at the Queen with the corner of his eye, as she was busy revolving objects in her mind.

“But,” continued the young man, “we must be quick in carrying our plans against the guardians, for if we do not despatch them before the break of day they will—” and he stopped abruptly.

“They will what?”

“They will despatch *us*. Haven’t I informed your Majesty this evening at the very outset that there is a black plot against us to-night?”

“Be at ease,” said the Queen touching at the same time a silver bell that was at the table close by.

Apollodorus appeared with his face pale and limbs trembling—a picture of bewilderment.

“Apollodorus,” said the Queen with a sharp voice and a stern countenance “take this,” and she took from her delicate finger a precious ring beautifully inlaid with a diamond of the purest water. “Take this,” she continued, “and inform the captain of my guards to secure the persons of Pothinus and Ashillas at once; tell him they must swing on the gallows before the break of day; tell him further that if he fails to accomplish this task he will swing there himself.”

The secretary looked at his royal mistress with astonishment. He could not make out what she meant in talking thus before the King. Cleopatra, with her usual penetration, guessed his perplexity.

“Tell him further,” added she, “that this is the wish of the

King as well. Lose not a single moment ; time is pressing," and handing him the beautiful ornament which was to be the destruction of the two greatest men of rank in the Egyptian realm, she fell back gracefully on her velvet sofa. The King threw himself on the back of his easy chair, and being tired, he closed his eyes and seemed to doze.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GALLOWS THREATENS TO WORK BOTH WAYS.

THE young King did not enjoy his repose very long. Disturbed by steps in the corridor he opened his eyes and looked round.

"And you could sleep in such dangerous circumstances? You seem to be indifferent to perils," said the Queen in a soft voice.

"Well, it was more of a nasty dream than sound sleep."

"What kind of a dream was it?"

"A most unpleasant one."

"Well, I am fond of dreams, and although I don't believe in them I always enjoy hearing them. Relate to us your dream."

"It is a painful thing to do, and all the more so because, incredulous of dreams as your are, you can't but believe it."

"That makes me all the more anxious to hear it; besides," added the Queen with a graceful smile, "we can kill the time until those scoundrels of guardians are on the gallows."

"Very well," answered the young man, "I dreamt that I was sound asleep in my bed, when I heard a hard knock at my door. It was almost midnight, and never before in my life was I disturbed at such a late hour of the night. I woke up to hear the explosion of thunder and the showers of rain and hail. I at first imagined it was the wind that produced the sound at the door, but I was mistaken; a

moment later and the knock was repeated. 'Who goes there?' cried I from my bed; 'your chamberlain,' was the gentle answer of my valet.

"He came in and with the dim light in my room I could see he was all agitation and excitement. 'What is the matter, Nef?' asked I.

"'A man muffled up has just arrived to have an interview with your Majesty,' answered the poor valet, 'and when I inquired his name and object he simply handed me this ring to deliver, telling me at the same time that my head would not be quite safe on my shoulders unless I delivered his message promptly, and here I am, my Lord.'

"I dressed in a great hurry and repaired to the saloon, where I met the muffled man, sitting stern and thoughtful. 'Your Majesty sleeps?' asked he in a husky voice. 'What is there strange in that? I sleep every night.' 'You sleep every night, my Lord,' said the muffled man, 'so does everybody else, but to-night the probability is that your sleep might have ended in an eternal one.' 'What sayest thou?' 'I say,' answered the muffled man, 'that your Majesty is on the verge of destruction; crime is busy in the dark stormy night while the innocent victim sleeps—your sword, my Lord, your sword!' 'But who *dares* such a dark crime against his Sovereign?' thundered I in an angry tone. 'There is one in Egypt who dares anything. Your sword,' repeated my guest without giving me time to breathe.

"Scarcely had I girded this weapon round my waist"—and the King pointed to the sword against which he leaned—"when I heard the footsteps of somebody in my palace, mounting the steps without being stopped by my guards. 'Treason! Treason!' cried I in my haste, and drawing my sword I

rushed to the door. 'Be at ease, Sir,' said the muffled guest, 'it is friends who approach now ; the danger has been averted.'

"A moment later and another muffled man appeared at the door. Placing sentinels there, and giving sharp decisive orders to his officers in the court below, he marched firmly to the saloon with wrath and haughtiness. His clothes were wet with rain and covered all over with mud, but of all that he was unmindful. 'For Phtha's sake what is the matter?' said I. A few words of explanation cleared up the whole business.

"It seems," went on the King, while Cleopatra was petrified with surprise, "it seems that a few days ago there was a black conspiracy by the greatest personages of the realm against the King and his guardians—I am only relating my nasty dream, your Majesty," continued the King in his own sarcastic way. "This black conspiracy was to dispatch the three together in one single night—a dark stormy night like this, for example.

"One of the inferior officers, who played a secondary part in this affair, wavered between loyalty to his King and loyalty to his—to his—well, it doesn't matter much to whom," continued the cunning Ptolemy. "He wavered a good long while, but at the last moment he stood for his King.

"Two hours before midnight he divulged the whole secret to the King's guardians. An hour later a man hurrying through the streets of the city was arrested amidst the violence of the storm. This man was on his way to transact the necessary preparations for regicide. He was brought to the presence of the guardians and, when interrogated, denied all.

"In this dilemma, the guardians, disguised in the shape of the muffled men, repaired with a strong escort to my palace, leading with them, at the same time, the accused man. He

was interrogated a second time, and a second time he denied. In this fix the effectual method your Majesty found so serviceable was tried. Following your advice, in chastising these curs of Alexandrians, I always kept the necessary *implements*—you know what I mean—for cases of emergency, but on a smaller scale ; nevertheless, they proved to be more than enough for the purpose.

“ The criminal, deterred by them, began to tell us a lot of lies. He declared—the scoundrel—that your Majesty organised the whole affair for the sake of having good government. He said we were always stumbling stones in the way of your Majesty’s benevolent intentions, and for the good of the people we must be removed. But my guardians believed the scoundrel. He declared he was on his way to the captain of your guards to give the finishing touch to the whole business. My guards repaired to pay their respects to the captain of the guards, while I, like an affectionate brother and husband, came to pay my devotion to your Majesty—what a nasty dream ! ” ended Ptolemy, with a wicked smile.

The Queen, paler than the wall her sofa was leaning against, and more rigid than the marble table before her, heard all with terror and mortification ; but before the King finished his story her features assumed that terrible and appalling look which terrified all who approached her.

“ Boy of a king ! ” she shrieked, with all the vehement hatred of an enraged woman. “ Boy of a king ! is it to mock us in our own palace, and to our own face, that you have pestered us with your presence ? Remember that, though honoured with the title of a king, you are still under guardianship. Remember further, that you are before your Queen, and beware how you behave yourself in her royal presence.”

The King did not reply, but simply rose from his seat, and, taking the infuriated Queen by the hand, led her to the window, which he had already opened. The dawn had long broken into day. The spacious court of the palace was swarming with soldiers, who stood still as statues without a single word or gesture. Their clean, bright arms shone brilliantly as the rays of the sun fell upon them. Immense crowds of people were already streaming towards the palace with angry and threatening faces. At a considerable distance from the palace, in a spacious piece of ground, stood a dull, gloomy gallows, with a figure hanging down from its summit.

“There!” said the King, pointing with his finger towards the fatal spot. “There hangs your captain of guards. One word from me is quite enough to have you torn by the mob. If you were a man, my sword would have run through your heart, but you are a woman; your weakness is your protection, I grant you your life, but you must forfeit your royal rights. Sign the declaration of your abdication,” continued the King, drawing a well-written parchment from his pocket. “To save your life you must sacrifice your rank.”

The Queen looked gravely down at the mighty crowd, and was dumb.

“Long live the King! Down with the Queen!” shouted several voices.

“The gallows! the gallows!” cried others, as they looked fiercely at the Queen.

“You see, the gallows sometimes works both ways, madam,” remarked the King to her, as if he was giving her a piece of cheering news, “but your royal blood saves you. Sign, madam, sign before it is too late. An infuriated mob is like a raging sea; it swallows everything in its abyss.”

The Queen still remained speechless and paralysed.

"Abdicate and escape with your life; don't you see how furiously the mob look at you?"

Cleopatra still hesitated. She could realise the situation.

"Hesitate a moment longer and both kingdom and life are for ever lost. There!" said the King, pointing with his finger as Pothinus and Ashillas appeared followed by thousands upon thousands of people.

"Hesitate a moment longer, and no human power can save you."

"What guarantee have I for my safety if I abdicate?" gasped at last the Queen, in a sobbing voice.

"The word of a King," replied Ptolemy.

"He *does* speak like a King!" murmured Cleopatra to herself, pale with mortification and astonishment.

"The gallows! the gallows!" roared the crowds as they rushed to break through the doors.

"One request," said Cleopatra.

"What?"

"Spare the life of Apollodorus."

"Granted," answered the King. "There he stands a prisoner among the guards. Orders have been already issued that none enter or quit the palace without my orders."

The crowds swelled in number, and moved in the immense space below like the waves of the sea as Pothinus and Ashillas arrived on the scene.

"The gallows! the gallows!" rose up the cry of this revengeful people.

"Quick, quick, madam, or you are a lost woman."

With a weak hand the Queen held the pen, trembling with rage and not fear. As she surveyed the concourse, a bitter

smile—the most bitter smile save one in her life—relaxed her rigid features. Then, with a woeful sigh, deathlike and deep, she slowly signed her abdication.

“Oh, for a reign of one day in Egypt! Oh, for one day—only one day!” murmured the Queen to herself. “One day, to pour my vengeance and revenge upon those howling dogs, and then—and then, death will be sweet!”

CHAPTER XV.

FALLEN GREATNESS SEEKS AN ASYLUM.

ON a dull, gloomy morning, a few ships were seen resting in a little harbour of the little isolated island called Cyprus. The sky was dotted with dull, reddish, stationary clouds. The sun was seen struggling behind the clouds like a big ball of glowing metal. The sea was grey and calm, and the mountains and hills far away looked stern and gloomy. All nature seemed wrapped in melancholy and silence.

In the midst of this sombre scene, a sad little party could be seen progressing slowly towards the harbour. No animation lit up their faces, but dignity shone behind their sadness as the sun struggled behind the clouds. The most dignified figure of the party was that of an elderly man, who walked foremost among them with a grief-stricken lady leaning on his arm. Her face, once attractive, was now thin and pale; her figure, once supple and haughty, was now worn, but still majestic, and commanding respect. She leaned gracefully on the arm of the old man, and looked pathetically into his face.

The man himself seemed in a state of abstraction. Surrounded by his retinue he might yet have been in a dreary desert, alone and forsaken. His grey head and worn face indicated suffering and age. His eyes looked anxiously towards the ships and then wandered away to the far horizon. He was evidently battling with fate, and summoning all his

fortitude to aid him. Poor Pompey, once called the Great, was no longer great except in misery and misfortune! Pharsalia was in his heart—a grim memory. He had had his battle with Cæsar, and he had been vanquished. His aspirations had vanished, leaving “not a rack behind.”

Slowly the party wind its way towards the shore, like devoted friends attending the remains of a departed friend. The moment they reached the harbour Pompey stood on the wharf and looked at the sea before him. Not a single breeze ruffled its surface. He drew a long deep sigh, and tried to be calm. For the first time a faint smile relaxed his rigid features, while his big eyes shone with a strange light. Hope, the last spark to die out in a man's heart, was not yet extinguished within him. He looked in adversity even greater than he did in prosperity. He was braving the storm. But alas! who knows what is in store for him in the future?

A few boats paddled towards the party till they touched the wharf. Pompey stepped in front of the others, taking the hand of his wife and helping her into the boat. Instantly the oars plunged into the water. The others, in their boats, followed until they reached the ship. Very soon all was ready for sail.

In the afternoon a gentle breeze for the first time began to ruffle the sea. The order was given, up went the sails, and on glided the ship.

“My dear Pompey,” said at last Cornelia, breaking the silence with her sweet voice. “You should not give yourself up to despair; the goddess of fortune may yet favour you in the future as she has in the past.”

“Despair?” said Pompey, his eyes kindling as he spoke, “Despair? A brave man with a strong arm and a sharp

sword never despairs. Despair is an idle solace which cowards alone fall back on ; brave men only hope. I am a Roman, and to Romans there is only one way to finish their career when they can no longer hope," and he pointed to his sword hanging on his side.

"You will yet retrieve the loss of Pharsalia."

At the mention of Pharsalia, Pompey's brow darkened, his face flushed crimson, and his chest heaved.

"I was pushed to that battle against my wish and judgment," replied he with emotion. "It was those inexperienced nobles who urged me to it in that fatal day. Thrice my arms were victorious, and thrice did fortune withdraw the laurels from my head. Twice did my brave Brutus charge, and twice did he break through the ranks of the enemy. But most of the nobility were anxious not to have their pretty faces scarred with wounds, and the faces of the young nobles were the only places at which the swords of my adversaries were aimed. Despite all that, victory seemed to be on our side. The moment the wild dash of Crassinus was arrested by Brutus's sword glittering through the back of his neck, all advantages were on our side. My brave soldiers performed prodigies of valour, rushing into the thickest of the battle with great courage. But the gods were against us. Poor soldiers !" continued Pompey, his eyes moist with tears, "they were cut to pieces in the last fatal moments, but died as they had lived like brave men."

"And Brutus ?"

"Brutus fought desperately ; he always charged where the battle was thickest, and every time he swung his sword a warrior was down. Strange to say, he received not the slightest injury. I learnt subsequently that express orders

had been given by Cæsar to spare Brutus, and he was spared."

"He is a prisoner, then?"

"A prisoner? He is Cæsar's most exalted friend now. Cæsar always liked him, but Brutus liked Pompey more than Cæsar."

The ship glided on quicker as the wind increased, cooling Pompey's hot temples.

"Our fate and fortune are now in the hands of Neptune.

have tried my luck with the god of the land; we shall see what the god of the sea will do for us."

"I hope he will be more kindly disposed," said Cornelia in a soothing tone. "We shall have a safe asylum in Egypt."

"If young Ptolemy is grateful for the services I rendered his father, we shall have more than a safe asylum there. The whole Senate was against his being reinstated, but I prevailed on them, and the banished prince became once more the King of Egypt. But kings are very forgetful, dear," went on Pompey with a bitter smile. "While they never forget injury, they very rarely remember past kindnesses; they know how to supplicate a Roman Senator in his pride, but they know better how to forget a Senator in his fall."

Cornelia saw the truth of his words. She had her own misgivings on the subject; something dark and ominous forewarned her of disaster. She looked abstractedly into the far distance. The little party grew less gloomy and sad as they neared what they believed to be an asylum of safety, but what was to prove the den of the tiger. Pompey thought of plan after plan. His only hope was Egypt; his only friend her young King. But he was relying on the gratitude of an ungrateful boy.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GRATITUDE OF PTOLEMY.

THE sun was high up in the sky, and the atmosphere was bright and clear when the beautiful harbour of Alexandria appeared in the distance, and the spirits of the party began to rise. Two hours before mid-day the ship dropped anchor in the harbour. Pompey stood on the deck admiring the natural beauty and position of the city, her huge buildings and magnificent palaces towering high up in the sky.

From the deck could be discerned a large army drawn up in the array of battle, with a young man mounted on a fiery chestnut horse moving from one spot to another. The sun glistened on their swords and spears. The military heart of Pompey swelled again as he saw the perfect order of the army. His ambitions revived. His hopes centred on those troops before him; his chance lay in those swords and spears, and the horseman that led the soldiers. Alas, that one misfortune too often follows another!

The young man was no other than King Ptolemy. His eyes caught the ship as it came gliding towards the harbour, but he paid no attention to it, for he had far more important affairs to look after. Besides, he had no idea that the little ship contained the illustrious, if beaten, Roman.

Ptolemy at last stopped for a moment near the shore and, for the first time, bestowed a little attention on the strange ship that made its appearance. A little boat was launched

down from it, and came and rowed toward the shore. A young man stepped firmly out from it, and asked to be led into the presence of the King, a request which was at once complied with.

Ptolemy scanned the young stranger with that insolent air which great power in a vain youth seldom fails to produce.

"Your Majesty," said the young man, as he saluted the King, "a Roman citizen, once mighty and great, now fallen and unfortunate, seeks refuge and asylum from the magnanimous King of Egypt.

The King surveyed the stranger, a stern look creeping over his pale face.

"Do the fallen and unfortunate *seek*," said the King, laying much stress on the last word, "do they *seek* refuge and asylum? I should think the proper word was to beg."

The young visitor bit his lip and the blood mounted to his forehead.

"Your Majesty," he replied, "Romans are so little accustomed to begging that the word is almost obsolete in their language; if I had used the proper word for the occasion I should have said he *claims* an asylum from your Majesty."

"Claims!" echoed the little King, getting more and more amused at the temerity of the intruder. "Claims!" repeated he, in his usual insolent way. "Good heavens! the gentleman will next claim my kingdom, I presume."

"He refused to lay hands on it when he had the power to do so, but, on the contrary, he aided in restoring the kingdom to your royal hands."

"Is the man mad?" asked the King from the officer who had conducted the stranger to his presence.

The hand of the young man involuntarily went to his sword, but he remembered his high mission.

“King Ptolemy!” he rejoined in a collected manner, “the unfortunate and fallen have always claims upon the generous and magnanimous. May you never meet with disasters and know what the despair of the fallen is. A great refugee stands at the port of your kingdom. Never before in his life did he ask favour from any mortal; to your Majesty he appeals for it for the first time. If fortune turns again in his favour, the prince who aided him in his misery will be amply rewarded in his prosperity. His name once upon a time threw terror into the mightiest kingdom of the world. Pompey the Great is in the harbour of King Ptolemy. Will you deny him hospitality?”

At the name of the refugee, Ptolemy’s features became solemn and respectful. His boyish insolence vanished, and he felt something like self-reproach at the harsh language he had used to the stranger, whose dignified and appropriate language raised him in his estimation.

“Gentle Roman,” said the King, in a subdued tone, “if you had first mentioned the name of the refugee, you should have met with a warm reception. Officer!” turning to the man who conducted the Roman, “treat our guest as becomes a man of gentle birth.”

“You shall have my answer immediately, I must apprise my guardians of the fact,” and so saying the King spurred his horse towards a beautifully decorated tent that was pitched some yards away.

The consultation did not last long. Half-an-hour settled the whole business. The young Roman was called into the tent, where he saw the King sitting in council with Pothinus

and Ashillas. The King could not look the Roman straight in the face, but always kept his eyes turned on the ground, and a slight blush tinged his pale face. Pothinus was the first to break the silence.

“Pompey,” he said, “rendered essential services to our late King of illustrious memory. Egypt ought to be grateful to him. In his misfortune he shall find in it safe asylum and warm hospitality.”

“A noble answer befitting a noble King and generous guardians,” replied the Roman, looking towards the young King, whose face blushed all the more at this compliment.

“Assure him further,” went on Pothinus smiling pleasantly, “that measures had already been taken to relieve his distress; no misfortune can henceforward befall him. A State-boat with State officials will at once proceed to welcome him ashore.”

“A thousand thanks, my lords, and may heaven bless you for your magnanimity,” and taking leave of the noble triumvir, he retreated respectfully. A few minutes later the cheering news was communicated to the fallen General.

Shortly after this Pompey approached his wife to take leave from her, as a beautiful boat with military officers awaited him close to the ship.

“Shall I not accompany you?” said Cornelia, throwing her arms gently round his neck.

“The King’s palace is a lion’s den, my dear. Wait till you see how the lion is disposed,” and so saying, he threw his arms round her soft neck and embraced her.

Cornelia felt a strange misgiving, and her heart sank within her. With tears in her eyes she pressed him to her heart, never to meet again.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HOSPITALITY OF EGYPT.

THE State-boat glided gently over the smooth waters, and Pompey, sitting on the stern of the boat, regarded with a military eye the order of the soldiers, and tried to make an estimate of their number. Beside him sat a man about forty years of age, his small cunning catlike eyes deep in their sockets. His cheeks were hollow in the middle, and his face was furrowed with deep lines which converged at the cheek-bone, producing a very acute and unpleasant angle when he contracted his features in something like a smile. He seemed a devotee of vice and crime. At a respectful distance from the two sat Aganimidis with four soldiers, who, though calm and serene, were armed to the teeth.

"How very disciplined and orderly these troops are!" remarked Pompey, addressing his neighbour, "they almost rival Roman soldiers."

"Ashillas is an able leader, my lord," answered his neighbour, trying to smile pleasantly.

"A general is always judged by the discipline of his soldiers, and the order of these troops before us does credit to their leader. I see they are in the array of battle," said Pompey.

"They are manœuvring, my lord; a decisive battle is soon expected to take place."

"Ha!" exclaimed Pompey, his face beaming with delight,

and his martial spirit rising again at the prospect of a war.
 "A battle is expected you say?"

"Yes; all Alexandria is astir, and the soldiers are ready for a decisive blow, that may take place at any time now."

"And against whom are these preparations so actively taken?"

"Against the King's sister, Cleopatra."

"Oh, yes, I remember hearing some details about the strife between the King and the Queen, but I was engrossed at the time with pressing affairs, and paid not much attention to the subject."

"Well," said his neighbour hesitatingly, "the Queen has been dethroned and banished from Egypt. She repaired to Syria, where she spent several months in active preparations, and she is now at the head of a mighty army quartering at Pelusium."

"This sword," replied Pompey, pointing to his weapon, "shall strike in the cause of the King who offered me hospitality and asylum; he shall be in no need of an experienced general. I have met with a fatal disaster at Pharsalia, but a general is more skilful and wise after defeat than after victory; our faults are our best admonitors. You shall once more," continued Pompey, addressing his sword, as he touched the hilt with his fingers; "you shall once more see active service, my dear, faithful companion; and this time you must redeem your character."

The colour vanished instantly from his neighbour's face, and its muscles twitched ominously.

"Your support will be highly appreciated, my lord, and will be amply rewarded," added he, still looking paler, and examining the General's sword askance.

"But you speak pure Roman," said Pompey, addressing his neighbour smilingly, and looking hard into his face as if it was once familiar to him.

"I am a Roman," answered the man.

Yes, to the disgrace of Rome, he *was* a Roman.

"A Roman!" exclaimed Pompey, still looking hard into his face.

"Yes, my lord; I am one of the Roman soldiers who were sent by the Republic to be the guard of the late King Ptolemy Auletes, when he was restored to his throne. I was also in the service of his daughter, and I am now in the service of his son."

"Your name?"

"Lucius Septimius, the chief of the Roman legions in Egypt."

"Your face is not unfamiliar to me; methinks I have seen you before in Rome."

"I have escorted your lordship more than once to the Senate."

"Oh yes, yes," bringing his hand to his forehead like somebody recollecting something. "I remember now, it was from me you received your present position."

"Quite so, my lord; and I am only waiting for an opportunity to show how great is my gratitude."

At the recollection of his past glory, Pompey crossed his arms and fell into a reverie.

They were now so near the shore that they could see the faces of every one of the persons waiting upon it. There was the young King looking at the boat. His pale face and cunning eyes were plainly seen by Pompey, and augured not

much good. A few more strokes of the oars and they would touch the shore.

Pompey looked back towards the ship to salute his wife. Her emaciated form was visible. She was watching with a palpitating heart and anxious eyes every movement of her dear, beloved lord. Her white delicate hand waved high up in the air. Pompey lifted up his right hand to return her salutation, when Septimius instantly drew a sharp dagger from his bosom and plunged it right into the side of Pompey. A sharp, piercing shriek from the unfortunate lady rent the air. Then, stretching forth both hands in a supplicating manner towards the shore, she dropped senseless on the deck.

Pompey saw and heard no more. Rapid as thought, his hand grasped the handle of his sword, which he drew from its sheath. A wounded lion could not have looked more furious than did the wounded General. He turned round, but the wretched criminal was by this time at the opposite end of the boat, the reeking blade still grasped in his cowardly hand. His place was taken now by Aganimidis, who with a drawn sword came to give the *coup de grace*. As the latter was aiming his sword towards Pompey, the General plunged his weapon into his heart and through to his back.

The four soldiers, who were despatched in the boat for the express purpose of finishing the General, if the first blow proved ineffectual, were seated in two different parts; two sat on both sides of Pompey near the helm, while the other two sat in the bow. There was only room for the former to handle their weapons, and the moment Aganimidis fell they were up on their feet with drawn swords.

Pompey, with the rapidity of lightning, extracted his sword from the body of Aganimidis, and with marvellous adroitness

despatched them one after the other, receiving only two wounds, one in the thigh, the other in the left arm. The other two were appalled by this heroism, but the eyes of their King and leader were watching them, so they advanced forward at the same time. But scarcely were they halfway when the point of Pompey's sword pierced the throat of one of them, who, with a gurgling sound, fell on the corpses of his comrades. The fourth thrust his sword against Pompey's heart, the point of which slid from the surface of the rib and severely wounded the pommel of the shoulder. The General, more infuriated than weakened by his wounds, thrust his sword into the bowels of the soldier, who fell lifeless on the spot.

Septimius, trembling and quaking at the other end of the boat, saw death in the terrible looks of Pompey, and resolved to end his treacherous crime in cowardly flight. Putting the fatal weapon once more in his bosom, he plunged into the water, followed by the rowers, who all made towards the shore, and thus the boat was left in the possession of five dead men and the dying hero.

Pompey was only a few yards from the shore. His eyes wandered from one man to another, until they rested on the little figure with the pale face and cunning features. He flung at him a withering look of contempt, and Ptolemy cowered under it with shame and confusion.

"Treacherous wretch of a King!" gasped Pompey, his sword still drawn and blood-stained in his hand. "The gods are now looking down from heaven upon your black treachery and crime; the just hand of Fate shall not long delay the vengeance your infamy deserves; I perish with the sword, but to you, ungrateful coward, a less glorious fate is reserved."

The stab which Septimius dealt had been forgotten by Pompey in his excitement. But the blood was gushing out from it now in a hot stream, and when he began to feel the keen smart of the blow he sank exhausted. The battle of life was over; the wickedness of the world could reach him no more. Pompey the Great was now Pompey the dead!

The moment after Cornelia gave her terrible shriek, the sails being still furled up, the ship glided away. There was nothing more to do. A few ships were ordered by the King to pursue it, but, moving at a quick pace, the Cyprian vessel was soon at a safe distance, and the pursuers had to come back in despair.

"The dead can no more come back for revenge," said Ptolemy, with his usual unpleasant sarcastic tone. "If we had accorded him asylum we would have surely drawn upon us the vengeance of Cæsar, who is a mighty conqueror now. If we had refused him asylum we would as surely have drawn upon us his own vengeance, and who could tell that fortune might not have favoured him again. We have extracted ourselves from a critical dilemma."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DARING ENTERPRISE.

ON a beautiful night a little boat was gently gliding over the blue waters near the Alexandrian shore. The breeze was cool and invigorating, the waves were gentle. Alexandria looked like a veritable queen of the waters. From the moment the boat began to move not a single word was uttered. Even the oars were so cautiously handled that they made little noise.

As the boat made its quiet progress, one light after another in the city was extinguished until all was nearly dark. The attention of those in the boat was directed to a luminous spot in the most magnificent palace in the city, which was quite close to the shore, and for the first time a gentle sigh was heard, and then all was hushed again.

"Who goes there?" asked a tall man in a commanding voice from a little boat that was lying in an obscure angle of the rocks.

"The service of the King," answered one of the party in the first boat.

"Long live the King!" was uttered as a countersign.

"Long live the King!" echoed the party from the moving boat, plying their oars with such force that the boat's speed increased.

"Be cautious and vigilant," cried the same tall man again with his clear, high voice, "a boat which is *not* in the service of his Majesty is expected to be caught to-night, and woe betide those who may be found in it."

A female figure in the dashing boat wrapped itself all the more closely at these words, while the rest cried louder than ever, "Long live the King!" In a few minutes the boat was at a safe distance.

"A narrow escape," murmured one of the party in a low whisper.

The female occupant raised her white forefinger in a commanding attitude to enjoin silence.

Several ships and boats were seen moving here and there. The party in the boat hit upon a happy plan, and instead of waiting to be challenged by others they themselves began to question every boat that came near them, cautioning the people at the same time that a suspicious boat was expected to pass close to the shore that night, and that they must be more vigilant than ever, and then, by a "Long live the King!" that was echoed far and wide by all around them, they kept moving onward.

As they thought they had reached a safe spot a grim-looking ship, moving slowly but steadily, came towards them.

"Hallo! who goes there?" asked the ship's commandant, as they came near.

"Long live the King!" answered one of the latter in the boat, seeing that this device succeeded wonderfully well.

"Long live his Majesty! but we shall see whether other majesties have the same chance," replied the commandant.

"Good officer," said one of the party, "we are on the same track. A boat is expected to escape with a great prize to-night, and woe to those who may be caught in it. We are in the service of the King, sir, the service of the King."

"That is all very well," answered the commandant, "we are all in the service of the King, but there is a certain party

to-night who are in the service of the Queen, and they must be detected at any cost. We understand that her Majesty is going to play a dangerous game for heavy stakes to-night, and I am of those who do not understand things unless they actually see them with their own eyes. Forward, if you please ! ”

“ Beware how you speak to your superiors,” replied the same man of the party. “ Before the close of the coming day you shall pay the penalty of your impertinence. We have direct orders from his Majesty, and we are better informed of the movements of the Queen than you could possibly be. Zeal in the service of the King is a laudable thing, but when you push it so to interfere with his Majesty’s plans, I call it impertinence. Do you understand me, sir ? ”

The commandant saw plainly that he was dealing with a man of authority, and much feared he might come to grief. The firm language of the speaker awed him, but, nevertheless, he resolved to make an honourable retreat, and, turning the helm of the ship, he came close upon the party.

By this time the female figure in the little boat vanished as if by magic, and nothing was seen in the place she occupied but a dark mass.

“ What is in that bundle over there ? ” asked the commandant timidly.

“ It is her Majesty the Queen of Egypt,” answered the man, who seemed to be the head speaker of the party.

The commandant gave a loud laugh, in which his companions joined.

“ Pass on, my lords,” said he, “ but take my advice, whenever you meet a boat always cry ‘ Long live the Queen ! ’ This is the bait with which you can catch the fish.”

"Long live the Queen!" cried those in the boat in the highest pitch of their voices, and the boat went on its way.

"May you prosper in your undertaking," was the captain's parting salutation.

"Amen!" answered the party from the boat, still plying their oars.

"A narrow escape!" muttered the speaker of the party, with a half-suppressed laugh.

The bundle moved, and its occupant raised a finger to her lips, and then whispered, "Forward!"

At last they arrived by the near neighbourhood of the beautiful spot called Pharaoh's Isle. The boat touched the shore, and the intrepid leader, who had held their lives in his hands all this time, stepped out with a sigh of relief. Then the lady stepped lightly out, and was at last on firm ground.

"We owe a great deal to Neptune," said she with a pleasant smile, "for having brought us safely from the adventures of the sea and the adventures of the night."

A chair was brought from the boat, and the lady, bundle-like, was carried in it towards the camp. Reaching a big decorated tent the men dropped their light burden and retraced their steps.

Before a little table inside the tent sat a dignified man. His face was bright, his eyes large and soft, his forehead high and broad, and his dress beautifully ornamented with gold and silver lace. With a pen in his hand he was bending over a parchment on the little table writing fast and hard. The attitude and features of the man revealed him to be the same General the reader first became acquainted with on the banks of the Rubicon. The big intelligent eyes and comely features and commanding figure were the same, but there was no more

a threatening cloud resting on his brow. It had burst in a terrible storm on the plains of Pharsalia, and had left behind it the destruction that characterises the hurricane. Like the sky after a fearful storm, the face of the great man in the tent was now bright and clear ; and had he not good reason for serenity ? Pharsalia had been fought and won. The comely figure writing before the little table was now the master of the world !

The General was so much absorbed in his writing that he never noticed that a light supple figure darted through the tent door with a stealthy step, and stood looking at him with soft drooping eyes, and a captivating smile.

“ This will do for to-night,” murmured Cæsar to himself, as he rolled up his parchment, and turning his face towards the door to breathe the cool evening breeze, he suddenly caught sight of the strange and charming apparition before him.

CHAPTER XIX.

VENUS AND MARS.

THERE are rare moments in the history of some of the greatest men of the world when they believed they were in direct communion with superhuman beings. Cæsar, after the battle of Pharsalia, was flattered by some of his officers and followers into believing that Heaven favoured him because a certain goddess was watching over him night and day, and that, like Alexander the Great, he was the son of Jupiter ; though, unlike the Macedonian hero, he had no wound in his leg to remind him that he was mortal. Cæsar was above the superstition of his time, but when he saw the fascinating figure before him, he could not help believing that his love-goddess had left her celestial abode to visit him.

There stood the enchantress before him, with her big black eyes darting arrows into his heart, her round beautiful beaming face, her rosy complexion, her long curly hair floating on her back, and her tall majestic figure towering high in his tent. Nature was calm and silent outside—a fit moment for goddesses to commune with mortals.

The moment Cæsar perceived the presence of the enchantress he sprang to his feet. His big eyes, bigger with wonder and astonishment, rolled strangely round as does a man awakening from a strange dream. His arms were hung by his side ; the features of his face manifested the indescribable expression of utter abstraction. His breath came quickly

and his heart palpitated. He tried to speak, but his tongue failed him; he tried to move, but his limbs refused to obey. He seemed under an irresistible spell.

The enchantress weaved and continued the spell.

"Gentle goddess!" said Julius Cæsar at last, with a supreme effort. "Is it Venus or Minerva that deigns honour a mortal with her charming presence?"

"Valorous Roman," replied the enchantress, with her musical voice, "Goddesses grant their charms only to gods; it is Venus come to have an interview with Mars!"

At hearing the melodious music of her voice every nerve in Cæsar's frame vibrated like a harp string. The being before him was beauty and majesty personified.

"And upon whom fell the happy task of conducting the fair goddess from Olympus?" continued Cæsar. "Iris must have been exceedingly happy for this piece of fortune."

"It is Neptune who carried me safely through amidst hardships and dangers."

"Oh!" cried Cæsar, smothering a sigh, "but mortals are not allowed to be jealous of the gods."

"I repeat to you that I am in the presence of Mars, and Mars is no less a god than Neptune."

Julius Cæsar, who was too astounded to heed her first remark, drew a long sigh of relief. If he was not Mars the enchantress was not Venus. There was no more superhuman pressure upon him; his enchantress was mortal like himself. He began to breathe more freely. He was again a Cæsar.

"For heaven's sake, who are you?" exclaimed he at last, in a supplicating attitude. "You call me Mars, but I am Julius Cæsar; I call you Venus, but what name do you give yourself?"

"I," answered the enchantress, with her long eyelashes drooping; "I call myself Cleopatra Ptolemy Auletes, whom people, once upon a time, used to style the Queen of Egypt."

"Once upon a time!" echoed he, distractedly.

"Aye!" replied Cleopatra sadly. "Aye! once on the throne but now on the steed of war, once in a grand palace but now in the field of battle, once with the royal sceptre but now with the royal sword. I lived as a queen and will die as such."

Her eyes grew luminous as she spoke, and the recollection of the wrong that was done her brought a beautiful rosy tinge to her cheeks. She seemed as if she had been born to be nothing but a queen.

Cæsar admired courage and self-assertion in all their forms, but in such a fascinating creature they commanded immediate worship.

"Do these tender delicate hands know how to handle a sword?" he asked, smiling at the absurd idea as he looked at them.

O, Cæsar! if the future was unfolded before your eyes so that you may see what *thing* these delicate hands handled, you, brave warrior as you are, would tremble with fear. These tender fingers were to handle, in their last days, *something* a thousand times deadlier than the sword!

"Do these hands know how to handle a sword?" echoed Cleopatra, repeating the General's remarks with astonishment. "If the Egyptians choose to forget that I am descended from the brave and illustrious Ptolemy, I, on the contrary, still remember my birth. We conquered Egypt by the sword, and by the sword we shall retain it. If the princes of our family turn in these days into faint-hearted women, it is high time their princesses turn into brave-hearted men. This," con-

tinued the Queen, drawing from her bosom a sharp glittering dagger; "this shall be plunged into the hearts of all cowardly traitors that lifted up their hands against my crown, or it shall be surely plunged into mine." Cleopatra brought the point of the dagger against the region of the heart with so much emotion that it went through her clothes and pierced the skin. Not even then did she draw the blade from her breast, but with her face flushed, and her eyes brilliant, she kept her hand on the handle of the sharp weapon. A little further impetus to the dagger and the goddess of beauty would have become a lifeless corpse.

Quick as an arrow Cæsar sprang towards the Queen, and, kneeling on both knees before her, he plucked the dagger from her hand.

"Your friends are my friends; your enemies are my enemies," said he, looking lovingly into her beautiful face, now more beautiful than ever. "You have only to command and your orders are executed."

Their eyes met. There at her feet was kneeling the most valorous and brave man of the most powerful nation in the world. Her pride as a woman was gratified; her ambition as a Queen was satisfied. The flush of anger vanished from her cheeks as if by magic. There was a tender light in her eyes. Cæsar regarded her with a supplicating tender look, and their eyes spoke the mysterious language of love.

Of all Cæsar's points this was the most vulnerable of all. He dared to disobey Rome, he conquered the most powerful rival of his time, he recklessly exposed himself in battle, he crushed difficulties, his irresistible will never knew what yielding was. But one thing he could not resist—it was that most

puzzling creature called *woman*. Here he was all weakness, yielding, surrender.

"The crown that was forced from your beautiful head," resumed Cæsar, "shall be returned with more pearls and diamonds on it. The sceptre that was wrested from these delicate hands shall be handed back and retained with more dignity and power. The wretches that dared lift up their hands against their lady sovereign shall receive due punishment, and Cleopatra Ptolemy Auletes shall again be the absolute Queen of all the Egyptian realm."

Cleopatra still fixed her powerful eyes on the hero kneeling before her and answered not. Cæsar's chivalry, with his manly bearing and beautiful figure, speech and attitude, filled her heart with gratitude and admiration.

"Oh, that I could repay your chivalry!" sighed the Queen.

"Repay my chivalry?" cried out the General. "It has been already more than repaid. These happy moments, in which I have seen the most fascinating lady of beauty, shall always be recollected with pleasure and gratitude—a bright spot in a life full of adventures. Repay? I am already repaid even now as I kneel before this beautiful figure and worship. These moments are the happiest in my life."

"Rise, noble sir; it is my place to be in your attitude. The kneeling posture is for supplicants and not conquerors."

"And am I not a supplicant after all? Am I not conquered? Have I not gone to-night through the fiercest battle I ever remember—a battle that has been fought and lost? I have been desperately struggling with my heart during these moments, but to no avail. Beautiful Queen, you have conquered the man who has never been conquered before."

Cleopatra drank in these subtle flatteries in silence.

“Cæsar has given his heart to you. Can he aspire to have a similar gift?”

Still the Queen seemed rapt.

“Charming Queen!” resumed the General, “the promises which I have pledged my word to fulfil, shall be fulfilled; Cæsar never changes his word; for these I ask no reward, and they should have no weight in our present affair. I want you to yield nothing which you cannot yield cheerfully. I have stormed many a stronghold and won many a battle, but I cannot storm a woman’s heart by force, for the heart of a woman, like the temple of the gods, must never be violated.”

Though obviously pleased, the ex-Queen remained silent.

“You neither love me nor have the courage to tell me so. You leave me to draw the disappointing inference myself.”

Cleopatra smiled graciously.

“You smile at my misery?” asked Cæsar despairingly, but good-naturedly.

“I smile at your mistake,” spoke the Queen at last.

“At my mistake?” replied the General vaguely, not knowing what the Queen meant.

“You have effected to-night one of your most brilliant victories. The heart of a woman is the most difficult stronghold to storm. Nations are conquered and armies are vanquished when a woman’s heart remains obstinate; it yields only to chivalry and gentleness, and to this my heart has yielded.”

“Indeed!” cried the General with rapture.

The Queen regarded him with one of her most fascinating smiles. Cæsar drew her white delicate hand and pressed his lips warmly upon it, and as he felt its soft velvety texture a thrill of happiness passed through him and his eyes were wet

with the emotion of love. He tried to clasp her to his heart, but the young Queen lifted up her forefinger in a forbidding manner.

"Not so fast, noble sir ; my heart is *lost*, but before it is *won* we must come to a mutual understanding."

Cæsar lifted up his eyes and looked into her's with misgiving, but her sweet smile reassured him.

"Speak out, my Queen," he said. "Say what you desire, it shall be granted, but for goodness sake don't play with my heart."

"Then you understand that playing with hearts is a dangerous business? Well said—it is because I don't want you to play with mine that I prefer mutual understanding—prevention is always better than cure."

"Do you doubt my sincerity?"

"Never!"

"Can a brave man deceive a beautiful woman?"

"Never!"

"What do you doubt then?"

Cleopatra paused.

"You doubt something which you dare not express," ejaculated the Roman.

"Brave General," answered Cleopatra with emotion, "I doubt neither your sincerity nor your bravery, but you are a great man with great aspirations. Your love for Cleopatra will be forgotten in your love for glory. I am an inexperienced young lady ; and before I entered this tent I did not know what love meant. You are going to light a consuming fire in my heart, and then—" and Cleopatra paused, with tears in her eyes.

"And then?"

"And then you would leave it to burn out until there was no more to burn."

"I swear to you, by my honour, that you shall never be thus deserted."

"When love comes in the way of ambition, it is generally the former that suffers. Your great and noble soul is aiming at something high and appalling. If I have the liberty to express myself candidly, I should say that Julius Cæsar is aiming at absolute power in Rome—a dangerous task, but one which is not unworthy of such a noble nature. Between Rome and Cleopatra, Cæsar has no choice: the former will always be the more attractive and pleasing of the two mistresses."

The General lifted up his eyes to the lady who, scarcely yet a woman, could still penetrate the innermost secrets of his heart and read so well what the great politicians of Rome could read no better. For the first time in his life he felt that before him was the only woman who was worthy to be something more than a *love-toy*.

"Where did you learn politics?" asked Cæsar, with a curious smile.

"In the school of common-sense."

"Not even Rome should come between me and your Majesty," said he at last, meditatively, giving her for the first time her royal title.

While Cæsar was engaged in this conversation with Cleopatra, he always retained her soft white hand in his.

"I am the happiest woman in the world," exclaimed the Queen, her face beaming with delight, and her eyes aflame with joy.

Cæsar took her hand once more and kissed it affectionately, and then rising from his kneeling posture he pressed the Queen to his heart.

CHAPTER XX.

A KING WITHOUT HIS QUEEN.

EARLY next morning all Alexandria was astir. The sky was clear and serene, but a cloud seemed to rest on all the inhabitants of the city. People were seen hurrying here and there in frantic fury, as if a great calamity had taken place. The buzz of their conversation was like the murmuring waves of an angry ocean. There was utter consternation in the palace. In the very early morning both Pothinus and Ashillas had repaired to the palace with pale faces and angry looks. The regular movements of the soldiers and officers showed that decisive orders had to be carried out at once. Danger was staring everybody in the face, and if they could not avert it they feared it would destroy them.

What had wrought this wonderful nervous frenzy? It was the news that Cleopatra had the previous night effected her escape, through the innumerable ships and boats of the King that were put there to frustrate her plans. The unwelcome news was carried to the city that very morning, and threw the Alexandrians into the utmost consternation.

Julius Cæsar, after the victory of Pharsalia, wanted to leave his adversary no time to breathe and no place of refuge. He accordingly set out on his track, and learning that the unhappy General had sailed to Egypt, he, like a good soldier who wanted to take full advantage of his victory, gathered together some of his choicest soldiers and followed him there with all precipitation.

On his arrival at Alexandria he was informed of the sad end of Pompey. The decapitated head of the unfortunate Roman was brought before Cæsar, whose heart was moved to its very depths at the ghastly sight. Waving his right hand, he turned his face away from the disgusting figure, and tears of sorrow sprang into his eyes. All traces of previous hatred and rivalry vanished in a moment. The glorious career of Pompey was remembered by his conqueror, and his fate appalled him. Cæsar was always reckless and brave in battle, but like all brave men he was magnanimous after victory, and paid a tribute of honour to his vanquished but noble foe.

He arrived in Alexandria to find that city in a deplorable state of confusion. Cleopatra had already come back with a strong army, and was quartered at Pelusium. Ptolemy, who was seen near the shore at the head of his soldiers on the unfortunate day of Pompey's arrival, was actively preparing to give his sister a decisive blow, and compel her to retreat from Egypt.

Cæsar, as the representative of Rome, could not refrain from interfering in the affairs of that kingdom. Rome was still, even then, the mistress of the world and the supreme judge in international affairs. Some historians allege that he came to Egypt simply to take a look at the charms of the Queen whose fame of beauty had already reached his ears some time ago, but owing to pressing projects at the time, he had to delay it till then. Whether this was the case or not, we have seen how the General was enamoured of the Queen. He accordingly espoused Cleopatra's cause, and with his usual daring and intrepidity ventured to enforce his judgment with the few soldiers he hurriedly brought

along with him. It was a mad project; but with Cæsar nothing could be called mad: success always justified his plans, and when love united her force to his energy, his resolution seemed as immutable as fate.

When news was brought to the young King, of Cleopatra's escape to the Roman camp, he fell into such a terrible fit of rage that awed everyone around him. His face became at once purple-red, his eyes bloodshot, and his fierce looks were like those of an enraged tiger brought to bay. It was not jealousy alone that wrought this change in him. There was no love lost between the King and his consort, but a keen sense of his honour being violated, and his consort being in the dead of night alone with a brave and charming Roman general, deprived him of his senses.

In the fury of his rage he hurried down from his palace and ran through the crowded streets of Alexandria in a wild and distracted manner. Jealousy is as strong as death, and, like the latter, it brings all human beings to an equal level: rank, wealth, honour, and even crowns and sceptres are all forgotten. Ptolemy rushed down the streets, and arriving at a spacious square crowded with people he threw the diadem off his head, its pearls scattering in every direction. He tore his clothes and his hair in a rage. Lifting both hands on high, he seemed as if supplicating the assistance of an unseen spirit.

These disordered outbursts of emotion always produce a deep impression on the spectators. Everything natural and devoid of affectation is always impressive. In the present case the effect was simply marvellous. The people were already excited without this powerful stimulus. Cleopatra's reascension to the throne meant the return of the reign of

terror, and every man and woman trembled at this gloomy prospect.

The moment the people saw their King with his diadem cast off and his clothes torn, they groaned aloud. The King, stirred by the response to his passion, marched forward towards the palace, followed by an immense crowd of people who were only eager for revenge. It was with the greatest difficulty that his guardians persuaded him to put on respectable garments and preserve his calmness. Scarcely had Ptolemy sat in council with his ministers, when a Roman officer was announced. On being allowed admittance, the Roman marched haughtily into the saloon. He was a young man, with a pale face and sunken cheeks. The persons who attended him as an escort remained in the court below. He was introduced as Cæsar's aide-de-camp, and the reader will at once recognise him as Marcus Brutus.

Brutus bowed respectfully to the King, but with a dignity befitting a Roman officer. The King, still in rage and fury, scarcely acknowledged this compliment, but his guardians bowed their heads and rose as a mark of respect; the King, with his face white with wrath, remained seated.

"I come before your Majesty," began Brutus, still standing, "on behalf of my General, to have an audience regarding the difference between your Majesty and the Queen."

"Speak and be brief," replied the King, not giving time to his guardians to reply.

Brutus resented this sharp answer, but affected indifference

"The General," continued he, "seeing the deplorable effects of this difference, wishes to bring it to an end by amicable means, which should restore harmony to the royal family and order to the kingdom."

"Your General is very considerate," replied the King, in a sneering way.

"In that case I should advise your Majesty to make use of his consideration as long as it lasts," said Brutus, his temper beginning to give way.

"You go beyond your message when you take upon yourself to advise us, Roman officer. Be quite satisfied with the message you are charged with. When we require advice we have wise men to give it."

"I come short of my duty if I am satisfied with advising your Majesty. The General desired me to give instructions if his advice is not attended to."

"To give instructions!" roared the King, opening his eyes. "And pray, what are the instructions of his honour?"

"If the difference cannot be arranged by peaceful means, both parties must stop hostilities, disband their soldiers, and appeal to Cæsar."

"Will nothing less satisfy your General?"

"All the General wants is to restore peace and order to Egypt."

"And this laudable desire became irresistible since yesterday evening, I suppose," and the King looked Brutus straight in the face.

The latter fully understood its meaning, but chose to affect dullness.

"This was his desire the first day he landed, but this state of disorder cannot be allowed to go on indefinitely."

"Cæsar has nothing to do with Egypt; it is a breach of faith, bordering on treachery, to meddle with other people's affairs."

"Romans are no traitors. He has not yet murdered an unfortunate General coming to him for refuge."

"You are Cæsar's officer, and lament the death of his enemy?"

"I lament the death of an illustrious Roman, to whom you owe your throne."

"You are a rude man. Cæsar, after having insulted our honour, means now to insult our person. By Jupiter, if your person was not sacred in the capacity of your office your head would have answered this very moment for your indiscretion. Inform your General that if he doesn't quit my kingdom within twenty-four hours, I have strong arms and sharp swords which know how to persuade him."

"Your Majesty takes too much liberty, and runs too much risk, to speak thus to a Roman officer. You have wronged Rome in murdering one of her bravest soldiers; you insult her now in threatening one of her most loyal sons. I bring you with me both peace and war; you rejected the former, and, therefore, I offer you the latter. The world must see now whether Egypt or Rome shall prescribe laws to the other," and, having bowed his head to the King, Brutus marched out from the royal saloon, his face flushed with rage.

"Pompey will be avenged at last," murmured Brutus to himself as he rode back at the head of his little party. "I don't regret we came to a rupture. I fulfilled my duty as an ambassador of Cæsar; now I must fulfil another—to avenge a friend who lies in his grave, and whose bones cry to me for blood."

As soon as Brutus left the royal palace, the King fell again into such a rage that his guardians feared he would go out of his senses.

"Have you ever heard of such unbearable tyranny?" he cried. "These Roman tyrants are the curse of the world. They make slaves of every nation, they pay no regard to our honour, they lay hands on our possessions, they prescribe laws to our country, and now they want to govern our internal affairs. But, by Jupiter, it shall not be; no, not as long as I live. Julius Cæsar will find a bed of thorns where he expected to have a bed of roses—no, it shall not be! not even the Consul of Rome shall have the audacity to dictate to a Ptolemy." The King looked at the relics hanging over the entrance door with pride and haughtiness.

When Brutus arrived at Cæsar's tent, the General looked towards him in an inquisitive manner. "Well, how went the interview?" he asked.

"I have declared war!" answered the young man firmly.

"You have declared war! that brings us into a fix; you were to declare war as the last desperate measure."

"And as such it was declared. The King was mad with rage. Cleopatra's escape to the camp was all over Alexandria, and this did not contribute much to his good humour. News in this country travels fast, whether good or bad."

"Could you not have brought the interview to some doubtful issue till our legions arrive?"

"Not unless Roman dignity suffers."

"And yet we have only a handful of soldiers," mused Cæsar, half to himself, half to Brutus.

"Then this handful of soldiers must bear all the dignity of Rome."

"What *was* his answer, Brutus?"

"That within twenty-four hours, if you did not clear out of

his dominions, he has arms and swords with which to persuade you."

Cæsar reflected no more. "You have done well, my dear Brutus; war you have given him and war he shall have." And with that dignified indifference which characterised him in all times of danger, Cæsar threw himself into a desperate war which almost cost him his life.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DAY OF VENGEANCE.

No matter how great the military talents of a general may be, it is often a dangerous and a risky business to fight against the tide of an infuriated nation. Cleopatra, through her previous cruel career, gained what tyranny always does—the hatred of the nation. As long as she was in power her disgusting weapons—the gallows, the axe, the poison—were in full operation. People were crushed with her oppression; but, smothering their enmity, they bent their necks to her yoke and put smiles on their faces, while their hearts were writhing in pain. Nevertheless, the hot steam of oppression was making its tension felt in the vessel, and no safety valve being provided to ward off the danger, the steam at last exploded and the Queen barely escaped with her life.

The dread of Cleopatra coming back to power set the Alexandrians mad with terror. It was not their allegiance to the King, nor their attachment to Pothinus and Ashillas that caused that irresistible tide against Cleopatra—it was their bitter hatred to her and their recollections of her reign, of terror. In their hatred to the Queen they forgot their dislike to the King.

Ashillas, the Egyptian general, as an answer to Cæsar's message to disband the soldiers, boldly marched at the head of his army and attacked the Roman camp with so much heroism and skill that Cæsar began to think the Egyptians

were not unworthy of his steel. He shewed himself so capable that he well-nigh brought about the destruction of the Roman general and his whole force. In one of these desperate struggles Cæsar had to save himself by swimming with one hand, while with the other he held up important parchments.

What a powerful force love is! It is deep as space, subtle as electricity, and irresistible as the tides of the ocean. Who can compass its immensity or investigate its mystery? When pure, it is a divine goddess sent by Heaven to soothe our troubles and heal our wounds. Without it the world comes to a standstill—a lifeless mass of matter. When vicious, it loses its divinity; it becomes a siren which allures sailors to destruction. It is then no more an ethereal gentle flame, but a burning fire which consumes the system and leaves the tabernacle of life a wreck of misery and desolation. Happy is the man who finds that gentle flame! Woe to him who is devoured by that consuming fire!

What a strange man Cæsar was! The very evening of the day in which he so narrowly escaped with his life found him in a gay mood with his love. He went back again to his happy life as if nothing extraordinary had taken place; he returned from his perilous adventures as if coming home from a hunting party. The enchantress in whose cause he well-nigh lost his existence was there before him, with her bright eyes and subtle charms, working her powerful magic over him. Between the fire of war and the fire of love, what a frame his must have been to bear all their exhausting consequences!

On went his gay hours with the enchanting Queen, and on pressed upon him Ashillas with so much determination that, in all human probability, Cæsar's power was fast drawing to an end. But the worst was yet to come. The wily Egyptian

left no means in his power unused to bring ruin on the Roman camp. One of them, which proved almost destructive to the whole Roman army, was the contamination of the water supply at the camp, where the Romans were quartered.

The moment this disaster was realised there was one expression on every Roman face; that of utter consternation. The news spread through the camp with the rapidity of lightning. The soldiers heard the news with terror-stricken faces. These brave men, who were wont to rush at death with astonishing valour and courage, trembled at the news of this disaster, like faint-hearted women. For Cæsar's sake they had braved dangers, and born hardships with perfect equanimity. His presence among them made them forget all their fatigue; but human nature has its limits. Of all our enemies, our wants are the most destructive and the most bitter. Who can live without water? Who can bear the excruciating pain of thirst? Those Roman soldiers could face certain death if need be; but to bear the agony of thirst and die inch by inch through its cruel agency was beyond human endurance; they could not do it—not even for the sake of Cæsar!

The tension discharged itself in low murmurs, and the murmur slowly developed into whispered discontent, and discontent broke out at last in open mutiny.

As these dangerous transactions were going on in the camp, there was a different scene in a retired quarter of it. In a decorated State-tent was Cleopatra sitting on a comfortable couch, her breasts almost naked, a thin transparent piece of silk only covering them. She had a simple white robe on her body, with beads of pearls round her neck. Before her was a round table, on which delicious wine and fruits were placed;

and in her beautiful delicate hands shone an ornamented harp, which she dexterously touched with her beautiful fingers—her voice vibrating sweeter than the music of her harp.

Cæsar was seated close to her—a picture of happiness. Of all pleasures in the world, Cæsar had loved two things best of all—war and woman. War he had had with Ptolemy, while before him now was the most charming woman of her age. Fighting took away the monotony of love, and love soothed the hardships of war; and with both these amusements why should not Cæsar feel happy?

The melodious voice of the enchantress filled the beautiful tent. Rosy was her face with the effect of wine and the emotion of singing, when a pale face appeared at the tent door and the slim tall figure of Brutus stepped gently forward. His face wore a pathetic sadness. It was he who in one way and another had hurried this disastrous war upon Cæsar, to avenge the murder of Pompey; but Pompey was not yet avenged, and Cæsar seemed to be on the sure road to meet his departed foe. Nobody dared to break the sad news of the disastrous discontent to Cæsar. This painful duty fell to the lot of this officer.

“Halloo, old chap!” said Cæsar, with his usual hilarity, “you come in good time to keep us company, my lad; sit down to a drop of wine and a piece of celestial music.”

“I have bad news, my lord,” answered Brutus, solemnly. “A heavy heart delights not with wine.”

“Has any disaster happened to the reinforcements we have been so long expecting?”

“No, but a disaster has happened to the forces we already have.”

“What! has the enemy broken suddenly through the trenches to the camp? There was no fighting to-day.”

“Worse! the camp is without water! the supply has been cut, and what we have is poisoned.”

The colour faded away from Cleopatra's cheeks. She was no general, but she fully understood that this calamity alone was quite enough to ruin them within a very short time. The harp mechanically dropped from her hands, and a slight tremor was noticed in her frame.

Cæsar himself turned slightly pale; he heard the news and well understood its disastrous consequences. He clearly saw that he had to deal with an enemy not of flesh and blood, but with one who, though unseen, was certain to annihilate him and those around him with unspeakable agony and suffering.

“We shall find the means to get water,” he said, with affected indifference. “The annals of history record that Alexander was in a similar fix, and when the last cup of water was brought to him he simply refused to drink it. Wanting to share the hardships of his army, he spilt the cup over the burning sand of the desert. ‘I shall not taste a drop of water until the last thirsty soldier in my brave army is satisfied.’ Alexander should not beat Cæsar in magnanimity, and where the former succeeded the latter ought never to fail.”

Brutus looked abstractedly at the General and admired his generosity and determination.

“In the meantime,” continued Cæsar, “get our legions ready in case of emergency.”

Brutus turned ashy pale, and his lips quivered. He knew that Cæsar could bear anything but rebellion, and he could not find courage to break the sad news to him.

"You look faint," remarked Cæsar to Brutus. "Are you unwell?"

"I have more sad news to give," faltered out the officer at last. "The soldiers are in a state of mutiny!"

Julius Cæsar lifted up his face, and his countenance changed suddenly, assuming a terrible expression: the angry spot appeared at once on his brow. He scarcely seemed the same man who a few moments ago was gentleness and kindness.

"You are not delirious?" said he, looking wildly at Brutus.

"I wish I were," answered the latter sadly.

Cæsar sprang from his seat, and waving his hand towards Brutus to follow him, he marched out from the tent. Brutus, fearing some harm might befall him in the present temper of the army, wanted to warn him, but dared not.

Arriving at the headquarters of the camp, the General ordered the trumpeter to sound for the soldiers to get under arms.

When the army was in full order, suddenly appeared Cæsar on the stage with his noble figure towering high in their midst. The moment his presence was felt a solemn silence prevailed. The angry spot on his brow had not yet departed. The severe and rigid expressions of his features awed all who were around him. There stood among them the intrepid General who had led them to so many brilliant victories. There he was, and there in his hand glittered his sword which was so often bravely handled, while his face was stern with offended dignity.

In a moment all the hearts of the soldiers melted again in love and adoration for their beloved General. But when he stepped forward and harangued them, their feelings could not be suppressed. Bursts of cheers rose up into the sky. The soldiers forgot their thirst and the dangers that threatened

them. As his features relaxed and his rigidness softened at these manifestations of attachment, higher and higher rose their shouts. "Long live the brave General! Long live Julius Cæsar!"

Brutus simply looked and admired. "What a wonderful man!" thought he to himself. "Cæsar has only to speak and all difficulties vanish."

After having thus appeased the army, Cæsar ordered a detachment of soldiers to follow him, and, surveying the neighbouring sites, ordered them to dig some wells in the ground. A few hours afterwards there was a shout all over the camp. Cæsar had found water for them, and in abundance too!

At last the long expected reinforcements arrived, and having fought their way through difficulties and dangers, they effected a juncture with the men about Cæsar. This done, all was over with the Egyptians.

A few days after these events the Alexandrians rose up one fine morning to find their city-wall once more decorated with innumerable skulls. Three important ones were placed on the most prominent part of it.

"The impudent boy King and his guardians," murmured the Queen to herself, as she looked on with immense satisfaction from her palace. She stood before the same window she once looked from on the morning following that fatal stormy night.

"Abdicate, brother, abdicate!" mused again Cleopatra to herself, as she gazed on at those ghastly figures fixed on the walls under the burning sun. "Abdicate!" continued her Majesty remembering the King's demand from her when she was dethroned. "I sealed my abdication with ink, both

ink and parchment wear off; but now you have sealed yours with blood, and the dead can claim no thrones. Poor fool that he was! He always objected to my methods of decoration, little dreaming that his own precious head was to be one day the most distinguished thing to adorn it. I longed for one more day's reign in Egypt: this happy day has come, my vengeance must be complete. I must give a final lesson once for all, to those howling dogs of Alexandrians, and the lessons I give are not easily forgotten. Pest upon the people and their rights! if they want elevation, I have a good number of elevators!"

And the Queen was as good as her word. That very day many bodies swung on the *elevators* in all quarters; the city was ornamented all over with gallows, and the reign of terror came back with all its unspeakable horrors.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MUFFLED MAN.

THE golden rays of the setting sun shot high up into the sky, giving the few scattered clouds a beautiful tinge. The sea was calm and still, a gentle breeze making now and then a few undulations on its surface. Innumerable ships were lying in the vast harbour of Alexandria, some with their sails up ready to plough the ocean, others, having just arrived, furling their white canvas and ready for rest. The high palaces of the city appeared with all their grandeur and magnificence, their high tops still tinged with the rays of the sun. The sky, by degrees, began to assume a bright orange colour, getting deeper and deeper until it was quite purple, giving all nature a solemn appearance. The buzz and hum of the day began to die out until perfect silence reigned. In the midst of this silence a young man was advancing slowly but steadily towards a solitary spot near the coast. He was in the flower of manhood, tall in stature and dignified. His face was ruddy, but long exposure to the sun had made it dark, which gave it rather a stern look. At his side hung a sword, with a gold handle studded with emeralds. His body was wrapped in a light black mantle, hiding both sword and wearer. His sun-burnt face and moustaches were muffled up in a careful manner, so that, apart from the eyes that darted fire now and then, nothing could be seen under it. Before this muffled young man walked a guide dressed according to the Egyptian

style. He was a little advanced in age, of a middle size, and, save a little timidity and nervousness, there was nothing particular to note about him. Although he was a little uneasy and avoided the frequented paths, there was no attempt made at disguise.

On proceeded the elderly man and on followed the youth, looking neither to the right nor to the left. They avoided the frequented paths so well that they scarcely met anybody on their way, and if they did, they did not take the slightest notice of them. Every person in this world is busy with his own tragedy of life.

At length the elderly man stopped a moment, and with his forefinger pointed to a spot in the sea near the shore, at which the young man unmuffled and turned slightly pale. His lips quivered involuntarily, and his eyes were slightly wet. He stopped a while, drew a long sigh, and with his finger he ordered the man to lead on, remuffling his face.

With mournful silence and resigned grief they kept mechanically on as if they were going to a burying ground, and no wonder, for to a burying ground they *were* going.

Twilight gave way to darkness, and darkness now in its turn gave way to light, for the moon was rising in all her glory. They had reached a lonely spot in which there was not a vestige of living thing to be seen except a solitary tree on which there was not a single green leaf. An owl standing on its dry branches uttered a hideous cry as he flew frightened away. As they neared the tree the guide, with his stiff forefinger, pointed to a heap of stones piled up under the tree, and sadly retired a few steps backwards to a respectful distance. The muffled young man stood still and looked mournfully on. His eyes wandered first carelessly round the dreary surround-

ings, and then fixed themselves upon that heap of stones under that solitary tree. What a dreary place it was! What a miserable heap of stones it looked! Yet in that dreary place and under that miserable heap lay one of the proudest sons of Rome, whose statue was even then standing among the greatest of the great!

The young man spoke not, moved not, wept not, but, like a marble statue, kept his eyes fixed upon that little heap of stones. How long he stood like that he could not tell. Time in such solemn moments runs fast or runs not at all.

At last the marble statue was animated by a strong wave of emotions, and the young man, like one coming out from a dream, threw himself on the ground before the little grave of the great man, his arm stretching on the cairn, and his head resting on the bend of his right elbow. What an electric effect had those stones as they came in contact with his hands! What a volcano-like eruption of feeling as his cheeks felt the touch of the gravestones! The icy grief melted away into hot tears streaming down his sunburnt face. He poured out his grief in convulsive sobs like a little child. His mantle was drenched with his tears. He pressed his lips upon the cold stones under which lay the cold bones of a man once the mightiest and greatest of his time. His heart was in deep communion with a great soul that loved him once dearly and tenderly. As the stones moved under his parched lips he imagined that the very bones of the departed were moving in the grave with unspeakable love and compassion towards his outstretched arms. What an awful sublime solemn thing it is when the living is in deep communion with the dead!

At last the young man rose up with a lighter heart and softer grief. His tears and sobs relieved his sorrow-swollen

heart. There the moon still shed down her silvery rays, and the waters reflected them from their smooth surface. Nature, wrongly or rightly unmindful of human sorrows and woes, looked just the same as she did a little while ago. Only the clouds changed their aspect a little, for round the white moon there was a ring of thin clouds tinged with faint blood-red colour. The young man looked at her and smiled bitterly.

"So did she look," said he to himself, "before the battle of Pharsalia, and so did she look before that unlucky departure from Cyprus to meet with disasters at these treacherous shores. But no matter, as long as there is life there must always be hope. Hope is the last thing to die in a man's heart. I have vowed a vow at this solemn spot, and if I live to carry it out I shall not have lived in vain."

The moon was high up in the sky when the young man retraced his steps, preceded by his guide. The blood-red ring round the moon faded by degrees until it disappeared altogether. The sea breeze blew gently. The city, in the near distance, appeared more striking with her softened lights and majestic silence. Above all the lights blazed those of the royal palace with unusual brightness and clearness. All its wings save one shone with numerous lamps and candles, throwing their light in the far distance.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN THE ROYAL PALACE.

ONLY one wing was comparatively dark and sombre. In one of its rooms could be distinguished, in the feeble light, the figure of a young woman. She was standing in one of the windows overlooking the sea, vaguely watching the undulations of its waves as they reflected the moonlight. She was of a tall, slender figure, with rich dark hair, flowing carelessly over her shoulders. She was dressed in deep black, which became her graceful figure.

The young lady looked from the sea to the moon and from the moon to the sea, then gazed at the stars, then watched the few scattered clouds in the sky, then in restless anguish of anxiety turned her face from the window towards the room, and as she did so the light came right against it, and all its details could be seen. She had big black eyes. Her face was beautifully rounded, with a faint dimple at the chin. Her cheeks were of a beautiful rosy tinge, and her lips were small and ruddy. There was an expression of delicate sensitiveness about her countenance. One word was written on those noble features, and that word was *virtue*. Is it possible that this sweet, angelic being is the sister of the passionate and diabolical Queen of Egypt? Yes, such was the case! We have before us now the renowned and beautiful Princess Arsino, the sister of Cleopatra.

The young muffled man and his companion walked steadily

on: not a word broke their silence. As they neared the city, the former took great care that his features were well covered, and that his mantle was well wrapped round his body, his eyes getting a little keener and brighter as they progressed. They sped their way a little more quickly now, for the quicker they went the less people they would encounter. But by a strange coincidence the path they took seemed to be the most frequented of all: people of all ranks and grades were taking that same path. However, the muffled man kept out of the crowd as much as possible.

At last they stood before the gates of the royal palace, which were beautifully decorated and illuminated. As the young man neared the entrance, he was at once challenged by the sentinels to give the password; he accordingly bent his head over the sentinel's ear, and pronounced in a whisper, "Venus and Mars." The sentinel at once allowed him entrance, but was much struck that such a strange creature should be in possession of the password.

"It is rather odd," remarked one of the sentinels to his companion, "that such a muffled simpleton should be admitted into the palace on such an occasion as this; he must behave most awkwardly."

"Possibly," remarked his companion, "he is a Parthian envoy. These Parthians, plague upon them, are awkward enough in their dress and behaviour, but when it comes to swords and spears, I assure you their awkwardness vanishes in a moment, and they at once turn out to be formidable people. I know what it means to cross swords with a Parthian warrior, and if you have the same experience you will, undoubtedly, think less disparagingly of them."

"Do you think the General will receive him at table to-night?"

"I assure you our General, more than any other body, values men more by their arms and spears than by their elegance and dress."

"Humph! I won't be a Parthian for anything."

"Very well, my dear friend, we won't quarrel over it."

As the discussion between the sentinels was coming to an end, the young man—always preceded by his guide, who seemed to belong to the palace—sped his way on, his heart palpitating a little quicker and his eyes getting a little keener as he went onward.

The guide, after entering the main court of the palace, turned suddenly into a somewhat dark gallery. He now took the young stranger by the hand and mounted a flight of steps. Another gallery was passed; they now turned into the right, another flight of steps, and another turn to the left, then a zig-zag winding passage was cleared, and the young stranger found himself in a little round vault into which a faint reflection of light from above shewed that they were in near proximity to their destination.

Without uttering a single word, the guide brought his forefinger to his lips enjoining silence, and made a sign to the stranger to stand where he was; then, issuing from the vault, he passed away like a phantom, the echo of his steps dying away in a few seconds.

The young man, with his right hand placed on the handle of his sword, stood still in his place trying to be calm, but the violent palpitating of his heart and the heaving of his chest showed that he was ill at ease. Time passed heavily and oppressively. Minutes seemed long, long hours to him,

and the darkness and loneliness of the place did not add to his comfort.

After a while, which seemed an age to him, a secret door suddenly opened in the wall, and a supple female figure flitted miraculously out. The young woman held in her hand a candle, the light of which gave a strange aspect to their surroundings. She lifted up her finger in an authoritative manner; then, making a sign to him to follow, she led on, after taking good care to close the secret door. Up, right, left, zig-zag, in fact all kinds of directions were taken by the young stranger, following his gentle guide, until they came to a spacious corridor dimly lit, when the young woman at once put out her light, and turning to the left, put her hand on the handle of a door and ushered the stranger in; then, lifting one of the carpets hanging over the wall, a door was seen which was thrown open and shut again. The woman looked now smilingly in to the man, and motioned him to take a seat, vanishing in the twinkling of an eye.

The young stranger found himself in a spacious saloon, elegantly furnished and beautifully decorated; costly carpets, Cashmere curtains, silver chairs, ivory tables, elegant brackets, and all the articles of ease and luxury. Before him stood a big silver mirror in a beautiful gold frame. He stood before it and studied his ludicrous dress.

"I pass well for a Parthian chief," mused he to himself; the words of the sentinel not having escaped him as he passed the palace gates. "These precautions are perfectly superfluous here. The Parthian chief must now give way to the more elegant Roman prince," casting off at the same time his mantle and muffle.

"Ah! that is more befitting," whispered he within himself

as his Roman costume, laced with gold and studded with precious stones, came to full view with all its elegance; his sword hanging by his side contributed to give more effect to it.

Scarcely did he take a seat, to breathe more freely and accommodate himself to his new surroundings, when suddenly a secret door in the wall gave way, and the beautiful young Arsino bustled forth, gliding into the room like an arrow. Quick as thought the young Roman sprang up to his feet, and, flying towards her, he threw himself at her feet, kissing the hem of her robe.

The young Princess turned crimson-red with blushes, and stretching her beautiful hand towards the prostrated young man, who passionately applied it to his lips, she gently raised him from the ground, her blushes deepening all the more.

"Rise, brave Roman!" said she with her soft musical voice. "It is before the gods alone that we have to prostrate ourselves," and, taking a seat on a silk sofa, she motioned him be seated on a silver chair before an ivory table.

"And you have run so much risk, and braved so many dangers for my sake?" said the Princess, sadly.

"I am more than repaid now," answered the young Roman, smilingly.

"But, oh! if any misfortune had befallen you I could never forgive myself; dangers beset you in every step and on every side."

"And what of that?" answered the Roman with bitter indifference. "Things cannot be worse; this is the comfort of the unfortunate: they fear nothing because they have nothing to lose."

"Don't be so despondent; I have had griefs enough to bear."

“Not be despondent? forsaken both by gods and men, hunted out on the mountains and deserts like a roe-buck; deserted by friends and spied by enemies. What else have I to hope?”

“It is useless to grieve over our past losses.”

“It is all very well for you to say so; you had no father treacherously murdered at the shores of this accursed city. You have no mother haunted day and night by the sight of that treacherous dagger which was plunged into his side. Oh, what an awful moment! It seemed as if heaven, in her anger, poured all her afflictions, and the gods, in their fury, smote us with all their wrath. I have just been to his beloved grave, and oh, what a grave! A little heap of little stones to mark out the spot of Pompey’s bones! A fit monument for an unheard-of treachery; but no matter,” mused the Roman to himself, “both assassin and pursuer must one day give an account for all.”

“I have had my own misfortunes,” replied the Princess, sadly. “I have played an important game and lost, but, woman as I am, I never despaired; despair is the refuge of the weak: it requires neither skill nor energy to fall into it: you have only to be helpless and inactive and there you have despair.”

Sextus Pompey—for such was the muffled man—looked into the dignified face of the Princess, and could not but admire such resolution in such a delicate frame.

“The stake of my game,” went on the Princess, “was Egypt and my life. You arrived to my assistance too late, and the decree of fate was against me. Cæsar was again victorious, and I lost both kingdom and liberty. I am, as you see, a royal prisoner in a royal palace. I am not allowed to

step beyond the boundary wall of this building. I am kept here to be all the more strictly watched. If I had been successful in my project the resources of Egypt would have been at your disposal, for I would do anything to make you happy. As things are, I run the risk of losing my head in effecting your entrance to the palace, but I willingly undergo these dangers and risks if I can only relieve your grief and soothe your affliction. If you feel now a particle of solace these risks have not been run in vain."

Sextus lifted up his eyes towards this angel of goodness, and his heart was moved to its very depth. Without uttering a single word he rose from his silver chair and knelt before his beautiful love; then taking her white delicate hand in his he applied it softly to his lips.

"Forgive my want of consideration, Arsino," said he in a low subdued voice; "it is almost ingratitude on my part to have added to your sorrows. You have given me a noble example. As long as I have this treasure of love I shall never despair. I shall brave a thousand more dangers, and risk a thousand lives, if I had them, simply to take a look at this beautiful figure and hear this gentle voice. Life is again dear to me. I will henceforth live, as I have ever done, for you. If ever fortune declare again in favour of the house of Pompey you shall be wedded, a great Princess, to a great Prince; that day shall be the happiest in my life."

Arsino could give no answer, for she found her sobbing head lying against the bosom of the Roman Prince.

Poor, poor lovers! taste the sweet and pure nectar of love as long as you have time for it. What a great mercy that Heaven, in its grace, hides the future from you!

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BANQUET.

WHILE the lovers thus met, in secret and silence, in the feebly lit wing of the palace, another more important scene, and of far more serious consequences, was taking place in that part of the palace which was all gaiety and illumination.

The great royal court was decorated with all kinds of green leaves and flowers, hanging on the beautifully painted walls, with much skill and taste. A long line of marble tables occupied the spacious court from one end to the other. Innumerable lamps of gold hung down from the ceiling, attached to gold chains. Covers of the purest white silk were spread on the marble tables, and gold candlesticks placed on them, with burning coloured candles, to add to the illumination. Rich bouquets of flowers, in precious foreign vases, were placed there, giving a most exquisite aromatic odour. Beautiful nymphs dressed all in white, with their breasts uncovered, and their long black hair flowing in rich masses over their backs and shoulders, sat on both sides of the court, with their harps on their knees and their fingers on the strings.

At the head of the tables were two great personages, the one a brave and handsome General, dressed in purple velvet, his face radiant with smiles, and his high forehead giving him an impressive dignity and regal power. On his head rested a coronet of flowers, which suited him remarkably well, as it left no traces of baldness under it. At his side was a

fascinating young lady, dressed also like the General in purple velvet, which markedly contrasted with her white breast, which was left uncovered. Her black hair was left unbraided, and allowed to flow carelessly over her back. On her neck shone magnificent pearls, and from her delicate ears hung two precious ear-rings of the purest water. Her eyes were unusually bright, and in her face there was a look of victory and triumph. One maid of honour on each side of these two great personages stood with a fan, moving it gently to and fro whenever the atmosphere felt a little oppressive. The reader will at once recognise in these personages Cæsar and Cleopatra.

Among the numerous guests at the table could be distinguished the face of Brutus, slightly pale, but, despite his satisfaction at the deserved end of Pompey's murderers, he was, nevertheless, somewhat gloomy and sulky. At his side was a young Roman, of light hair and clear blue eyes. He was Lucilius by name, who, in after years, tried to save Brutus from a sad end by almost sacrificing himself for his sake.

All the plates, knives, spoons, and the like, were of pure gold. Beautiful maids of honour and bright, good-looking lads were moving about to serve the illustrious guests. The musicians applied their fingers to the strings of their harps, which vibrated with enchanting tunes. The songstresses sang with their soft, clear voices choice Egyptian songs, which thrilled every heart with an ecstasy of pleasure. Wine of the most delicious quality went round, and as it did so the guests became brighter and more hilarious. Only Brutus and Lucilius seemed a little dull, but they enjoyed it all the same.

"There is a puzzling, victorious look about Cleopatra to-night," remarked the former, "which I cannot make out."

"Is this the only time," replied Lucilius, "that she has looked puzzling and victorious? She has always been like that. Remember, Brutus, that she is a woman, a beautiful woman, and as such she must always carry her point."

"But there is something puzzling in her fascinating eyes to-night."

"The eyes of a woman are always puzzling; her heart is more puzzling still."

"You seem to be in good humour to-night, Lucilius; as for me, I feel a little stupid and dull. But with all that, I guess I read in yon eyes a victory of one kind or other. To judge from their appearance, one would think that she had conquered Rome."

"And hasn't she done that, Brutus? Yonder sits the greatest man in Rome, a grand captive to a grand Queen."

Brutus bent his lips over his friend's ear. "To conquer Cæsar," whispered he, "is not conquering Rome: Cæsar is *not* Rome."

"Hush!" replied his friend. "Be prudent, Brutus, be prudent!"

The conversation of the two friends came to an end as the musical and powerful voice of the dwarf-buffoon, Tigellus, rang to its highest pitch in the hall, its sound reverberating in the spacious court, making a wonderful impression upon the hearers.

"You are the king of singers, Tigellus," said Cæsar, paying a compliment to the buffoon.

"I strongly object to the title," answered the singer, with

that boldness which buffoons alone are allowed to have in courts.

"You object to a royal title?" replied Cæsar, with amazed humour at the dwarf's joke.

"Most decidedly, and in the most emphatic way possible," answered Tigellus. "To give me the title of a king is to set me on the road of destruction. Men disappear miraculously as soon as they put their feet on the steps leading to the throne, while, if they are destined to reach it, they disappear more miraculously still. I mean to live as long as possible, and as the crown is incompatible with life, I take you all to be witnesses that I abdicate: ladies and gentlemen, I abdicate!" and, taking a false crown, made of papyrus leaves, from his head, he threw it to the ground, lifting his head at the same time towards the Queen and General in a most awkward manner.

Cæsar involuntarily winced under the innocent jest of Tigellus, and Cleopatra's brow frowned slightly; but, with their powerful self-control, they appeared to relish the joke, and, with the rest of the guests, fell into a fit of laughter.

"Upon my word," remarked Brutus in a low voice to his friend, "that buffoon is no fool. Have you remarked the effect his joke produced on the illustrious couple?"

Lucilius bowed his head in the affirmative, but answered not.

"Won't your majesty consider the matter before you abdicate?" said Cæsar to the dwarf, repressing a laugh. "Kings do not yield their crowns so easily as you do."

"I abdicate! I abdicate!" repeated Tigellus, rising from his seat and lifting up his right forefinger with an air of authority. "My resolution is irrevocable. If my subjects

are stupid enough not to do without a king, I am wise enough to do without subjects"; and he picked up his crown from the ground and threw it up into the air, and as it touched the ceiling it got entangled in the hook from which hung a gold lamp, and rested there, hanging over Cæsar and Cleopatra's heads. The company fell into such a fit of laughter that they had to hold their sides with their hands.

Cleopatra brought her head near Cæsar's, and bringing her lips close to his ear, "A good omen! a good omen!" whispered she to him.

Cæsar lifted up his goblet. "Here, friends," said he, "a toast to our illustrious, but abdicating king." All the cups of the company, Brutus and his friend included, were lifted high in the air, and then emptied to the last drop.

"Well," remarked Tigellus, as he swallowed a quantity of wine—"well; after my abdication, I can at least drink my wine with ease and confidence. There can be no poison in it now."

"As you don't condescend to be a king," resumed Cæsar, "what else do you desire to be?"

"A queen, noble sir, a queen!" replied the jester. "I would then have all the prerogatives of the crown and none of its responsibilities and dangers," and he thrust out his ugly and deformed head towards the Queen.

"But, you know," answered Cæsar, "unfortunately you are a man, and people have not yet arrived at the process of making a queen of a man; you are absurd in your demand, you fool. You seem to have lost your senses with your crown," added the General, looking up towards the papyrus crown.

"Well, well," replied the buffoon, trying to look as stupid

as possible, "I have never thought of that ; that's a difficulty, that's a difficulty," repeated he, putting his hand on his temple in an awkward manner. "Since I abdicated my kingship and cannot be a queen I prefer to remain what I am, the most illustrious Tigellus!" and resuming his seat, he once more plied his dexterous fingers on the harp, amidst the boisterous laughter of the company.

"I assure you," whispered again Brutus to his neighbour, "there is more wit than fun in the head of yon rascal of a buffoon ; methinks," added he with a pleasant smile, "his joke touched a tender part in Cæsar's heart."

"That buffoon," answered Lucilius, "spoke what the bravest and wisest men in Rome dare not utter in Cæsar's presence ; but this is the prerogative of the dwarf. One must turn a buffoon before one is allowed to speak candidly and wisely in these days."

Again the nymphs touched their musical instruments and raised their musical voices. At the end of each song the company indulged in wine to an unusual extent. Cæsar having imitated Alexander in his military achievements, could not see why he should not emulate him in his wine-drinking capacity. Accordingly, a Herculean cup, similar to the fatal one which the Macedonian General is said to have used at his last banquet, was placed before the Roman leader, and at the end of each song he raised that tremendous cup and pledged the party.

Several times the songs ended and began, and several times were the cups filled and emptied, all the guests falling into an ecstasy of happiness. Amid beautiful maids and celestial music, and delicious wines and fragrant flowers, and the

luxury of a royal banquet, what else could the hearts of Egyptians desire?

As the banquet neared its end, it was quite evident that all were far gone with the fumes of wine. Cæsar was now a perfect Alexander, with his Herculean cup as well as with his Herculean sword. His face was purple-red, his eyes blood-shot, and there was about him that gay and careless happy look characteristic of people after excessive drinking. The guests, having followed the example of the great man, did not look any better. All except three persons, the wily Egyptian Queen, and the wily Roman officers, Brutus and Lucilius.

It was an hour past midnight when Cleopatra, with her charming looks, now more charming with moderate quantities of wine, which gave more lustre to her colour and life to her spirits, rose up a perfect goddess of beauty, and with her clear musical voice ordered the company to drink to the health of her illustrious visitor. At once every guest at table respectfully rose up, and, amidst a burst of cheers and "Long life to Cæsar," the cups were emptied to the dregs; then all sat down again to happy conversation.

Suddenly there was dead silence, and the two Roman friends looked up to discover the cause, when Cæsar, with his high stature and noble figure, his face radiant with joy and happiness, rose up beside the beautiful Queen, whose face looked now more victorious than ever.

"Before proposing"—began the General, in his bold careless style—"before proposing the toast of our illustrious hostess, her most gracious Majesty Queen Cleopatra, we thought it fit to give you an agreeably surprising piece of news."

All looked up in an anxious and expectant manner. The

two Romans looked at one another, not being able to guess the substance of the agreeable surprise.

"Ever since," resumed Cæsar, "we landed on these shores, we had a warm—a very warm—attachment to her Majesty."

"There can be no doubt about it," whispered Lucilius to his friend sarcastically. "There is substantial proof of this attachment!"

While Cæsar spoke Cleopatra surveyed the guests with a searching eye; the whisper of the two friends did not escape her.

"We will be only telling the plain truth," went on Cæsar, "when we declare that the Queen of Egypt is the most accomplished royal lady in existence, both as regards her unrivalled personal charms and her attainments in learning and wit."

The two friends exchanged looks.

"Such unequalled charms and attainments," went on the General, with unusual hilarity, "should not be lost to the Roman world."

"Good heavens! what next?" remarked Lucilius again; but Brutus answered not. Like a fascinated being he kept his eyes on the General's figure and his attention on his speech.

"One place alone," continued Cæsar, "is fit to be the abode of such a goddess, and that place is Rome. Therefore, it is our pleasure to be wedded to the Queen soon, and accordingly we declare before all the world that Queen Cleopatra shall be the Consort of Julius Cæsar. Her Majesty will reign with us in the Capitol, where, above her present title, she will be the mistress of Rome, the mistress of the world!"

The guests—scarcely understanding the meaning of his words, being, in common with the General, too far gone with

the effect of the intoxicating liquor—rose up like one man with a burst of enthusiasm.

“Long live the Queen! long live the Emperor!” after which they emptied their cups to the last drop.

Brutus and his friend alone remained sitting with their cups untouched. They both turned deathly pale, and felt as if they were in a dream.

Cæsar was too busy with his love and wine to pay any attention to this exception. Cleopatra alone was watching their movements, and the rosy colour faded away from her cheeks with anger.

No sooner had the guests sat down than the slim figure of Brutus was seen standing with his cup, still untouched, in his hand.

“I drink,” said he, with a bold undaunted voice, “I drink to the glory and prosperity of the grand mistress and queen of the world; such was Rome in the past, and such must she always be.”

Nobody stirred except Lucilius. Touching his cup with that of Brutus, they both shouted, “Long live the Republic! long live Rome!” and emptying their cups they resumed their seats with dignity.

A dead silence followed, and not a single soul moved.

In the midst of this appalling silence a strong clear voice, which sounded strangely familiar in their ears, rang in the air.

“Long live the Republic! Rome is not dead yet.”

All looked out to the direction whence the strange voice came, but no form of any human figure could be discerned.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ADVENTURE.

THE moon was waning towards the west.

Three miles distance from the city, on an elevated piece of ground, stood the Roman camp, overlooking both sea and land. The road leading to it was covered on both sides with shrubs and high trees to a good distance.

It was two hours past midnight when Brutus and his friend left the royal palace. Their swords hanging at their sides and their mantles wrapped round their bodies, they walked side by side, solemn and sad.

They crossed the quarters of the city which were silent and noiseless. All Alexandria was buried in her slumber; all, save the royal palace, which was still blazing with lights, and the hum of distant noises came to their ears like muffled sounds.

Soon they found themselves in the open air, and the cool breeze soothed their hot temples. They both drew a long, deep sigh, and felt relieved to be by themselves.

"Goodness!" cried out Brutus, as they were out of people's hearing, "the secret came out at last. I thought there was something puzzling to-night in the eyes of that wily Queen. No wonder that her fiery eyes had a victorious look about them, for she meant to conquer both Cæsar and Rome. The first she attained, the second she can never realise—no, not as long as a single Roman lives."

"I could scarcely believe my senses," answered Lucilius.

"For awhile I was quite bewildered, and thought I was in a dream ; I am bewildered still," then, putting his fingers on his forehead, "Cæsar committed a grave error," continued he, "a very grave error."

"You call that only an *error* ?" replied Brutus. "An error ? By the gods, it is treachery, and one of the worst type."

Lucilius looked into his friend's face, and it was ashy pale.

"Remember, he is our friend," began Lucilius, gently ; "we should rather try to correct than condemn him."

"Friend or no friend, it matters little ; the first false step that Cæsar takes against the freedom of Rome, he is a lost man."

"Hush, Brutus ! be prudent ; words travel very fast in the night."

"Did you mark his words ?" went on Brutus, not regarding in the least his friend's remark. "Did you mark his bold assertion to raise that witch into that exalted rank of the mistress of Rome ? Good heavens ! and such words in the ears of Roman officers ?"

"Cæsar was out of his senses to-night."

"It is you and I who are out of our senses to-night ; Cæsar is not. Have you marked his words '*To reign with us* ?' By Jupiter, it is too much, too much. Let him say," went on Brutus, his face now flushed with anger, "let him say that once more, and, dearly as I love him, this sword shall pierce his heart," and he half drew the weapon.

"I, too, am a Roman ; I love Cæsar dearly, but I love Rome more ; if he seriously means to conspire against the safety and freedom of Rome, not all the brave swords in the world can snatch him from his fate."

"And why shouldn't Cæsar conspire against Rome ? We

Romans are beginning to degenerate. We have fallen to an awful depth below the valour and greatness of our forefathers; our men are turning effeminate creatures; give them amusements and dinners and you make slaves of them. Our Senators are becoming mere flatterers; keep them in power and you can mould them just as you please. Who in the world ever heard of a candidate to Consulship marching to the Capitol at the head of an army, disregarding the orders of the nation? but, nevertheless, our cowardly flatterers of Senators met Cæsar with wreaths of flowers and marks of high honours, the traitors! We call ourselves Romans? Bah! our ancestors would have risen like one man and shed their blood to the last drop before the nation was trampled under the foot of one man."

"Things must come to a crisis."

"And to crown all these miseries," continued Brutus, not heeding in his heat his friend's words, "here comes an Egyptian witch of a queen and sets her throne in the very heart of the proudest city that ever existed upon the face of the earth. Alexandria is no fit place for her, certainly not: Rome *is* a fit place, and, therefore, she must rule the Romans as she did the Alexandrians, and deck our city walls with the heads of our princes and nobles; and, therefore, for the sake of a woman's ambition Rome must be enslaved, and, for the sake of one man's passion, that accursed witch must reign in the Capitol! What a fine arrangement! Splendid! splendid!"

Here Lucilius put his left hand on the shoulder of his friend, and simply pointed with his right forefinger to a spot a little distance off.

"What is it?" asked Brutus.

"Don't you see something like the head of a man peeping yonder among the leaves?"

"I see nothing."

The two young men walked on silently for a short distance, then they stopped to breathe a moment, and, as they did so, their eyes fell towards the spot where the remains of poor Pompey were buried. Brutus sighed deeply, and pointed with his finger towards the spot, which looked grey and sombre in the dim light,

"There!" said he, "there lies a brave Roman."

"He deserved a better fate, Brutus."

"Who knows what is in store for other people in the future?"

"Do you know of any news about Sextus?" asked Lucilius.

"No, except what we all heard: that he is gathering an army in Spain, and gaining strength."

"Cæsar is beginning to feel a little uneasy about the matter."

"And well he might be," answered Brutus. "Sextus is a skilful general and brave soldier."

The place where they stood was a little clear from trees, so that the moonlight came down clearly upon them. Close to them was a small piece of ground all covered with shrubs and trees. As they started to move again, Lucilius touched his friend once more, and pointing with his finger to the very spot he pointed a little while ago, "There, again!" he cried.

Brutus looked, but there was no time to answer: a party of men, armed to the teeth, rushed out from the thicket with wild looks and drawn swords, dashing furiously at the two friends.

"Down with the traitors!" cried a severe voice as they rushed against the Romans, and closed upon them.

Quick as lightning the two young Romans threw their mantles aside, and, with their swords drawn, stood their ground.

"Whom do you seek?" demanded Brutus from those in front of him, thinking they mistook them for somebody else.

"We seek the two mad Romans," answered one of them, in broken Roman, "who had the impertinence to insult the Queen at her own table, and you are the men. Learn your crime before you meet your fate," lifting at the same time his sword to deal the fatal blow.

No sooner were the words uttered than Brutus' sword ran through his heart, and the man, with a single, shrill scream, fell lifeless to the ground.

At the same instant the weapon of Lucilius pierced his adversary, who fell backwards with a curse.

The assailants, at the sight of this, saw clearly that they had to deal with brave warriors, and for a moment they wavered.

"Down with the traitors, men!" thundered behind them the voice of a tall man speaking in Egyptian, but with a foreign accent.

At this word of command another rush was made, and a dexterous thrust was dealt at Brutus, that if it had not been avoided would have proved fatal; but the young Roman bent his body so much below his adversary's sword that he had to support the weight of his body with his left hand on the ground. The sword only touched his shoulder, causing a slight wound, Brutus at the same time ran his enemy with his weapon, the sword glittering through the back of his opponent's side, then, with wonderful military agility, he sprang back, regaining his old posture; but in doing so, another assailant pushed his sword into his left side, but sliding

upwards, the weapon made an extensive but superficial wound which, however, bled profusely. The Roman, without losing a single moment, threw himself violently at the man as he was receding and pushed his weapon through the neck of his enemy, who gave a loud shriek, and both he and his accomplice fell down almost at the same moment. Thus three bodies were stretched now at Brutus' feet.

Brutus had now a moment to breathe, and as he did so he threw a rapid glance at the little field of battle. Already three corpses were lying before Lucilius, and the latter was now hotly engaged with the fourth.

Two more men advanced towards Brutus, the clear, sharp voice of the tall man thundering again in their ears.

"Down with the impudent traitors, soldiers!" But this time it was not pronounced in broken Egyptian, but in pure Roman. Brutus started.

"Good gracious!" cried he, apostrophising. "Are there Romans among the assassins?"

"Do your duty to your Queen," cried again the same clear, sharp voice, ringing in the silence of the night.

Rage and indignation gave Brutus a new force; and he had an advantage now. The road was so narrow there that the number of the assailants did not contribute much to their side, while the bodies of the dead served Brutus as a barricade.

"We have to step on the dead to reach the living," said one of the two assailants, as they came forward.

"Humph!" said Brutus to himself, "the cool courage of the fellow in such a moment when life hangs by a thread is worthy of a better cause; I like immensely to measure swords with him."

"Give up your sword, or you are a dead man," said the second adversary, stepping forward.

"Take it, coward!" replied Brutus, and, quick as an arrow, he rushed forward, thrusting his sword into the speaker's mouth, who, with a terrible yell, shrank backward to the ground.

The other man stepped cautiously to the front, and from the manner he handled his sword, Brutus saw that before him was an expert in arms. Twice he aimed at the adversary's chest, and twice was he repulsed, with a wound on the left arm and another in the right thigh; but, instead of getting furious, Brutus learnt to be cool. He saw that his dashing way was rather injurious to him, while his opponent, inspired with confidence, began to be reckless, so much so, that he boldly pressed forward and aimed a thrust at Brutus's heart, but it was so cleverly parried that it only touched the side of his head, at the instant of which Brutus rushed straight forward and plunged his sword into the man's heart.

"Hallo!" cried the same clear, loud voice behind, "must it always take a brave Roman to kill a brave Roman?" and he advanced forward with his sword drawn.

Brutus turned round for an instant to see how fortune went on with his struggling dear Lucilius, but there was no Lucilius standing. The brave soldier was lying helpless on the ground with his hand pressed tightly against his side, from which blood gushed out like a little stream.

"I am a dead man," called Lucilius to his friend, with an effort to sit up, "save yourself, dear Brutus," and then his head fell backwards, and he was senseless.

But at the same time Brutus's loss of blood began to tell—blood from his shoulder, his thigh, his side, and his head.

In such supreme moments the wounded do not feel the effect of injuries. His head began to feel dizzy, his ears began to whiz, as if bells were ringing inside, his limbs began to tremble, and all his vital powers to fail. Scarcely had he raised his sword to defend himself against the last and only survivor, who seemed to be the leader of the party, when he swooned and fell to the ground.

"Aha! aha!" cried his assailant, "it is not so much hard work after all; it is rather a great mercy to despatch you from so much suffering. Oh, how I longed for this opportunity! It is worth a whole lifetime. You were once Pompey's friend," went on the assailant, addressing Brutus, who was now helplessly lying on the ground. "You were Pompey's friend, and therefore you shall have the consolation of dying with the same weapon that was planted into his side," drawing at the same time a sharp dagger from his belt. "I am Lucius Septimius, who despatched Pompey; your father once caused my father to be executed: here is a son reeking vengeance upon your accursed life!" And the sharp instrument glittered in the moonlight as it was lifted to give the fatal blow.

"Here is a son reeking vengeance upon *your* accursed life!" thundered the angry voice of an unknown, muffled man who appeared miraculously at that instant; and both dagger and arm fell upon Brutus' bosom by the blow of a sword; then, quick as an arrow, the muffled man grasped the glittering weapon.

"I will not kill you with my sword," thundered the muffled man in the ears of the terror-stricken Septimius, "the very same dagger that was planted in my father's side, shall plunge into your wicked heart. Cowardly traitor! I

am Sextus Pompey ; learn and tremble, the vengeance of the gods and the son of a murdered man will be now poured upon your accursed soul, cowardly traitor that you are!" and he plunged the dagger into the assassin's heart up to the very hilt. Septimius, with a piercing shriek, like the yell of a dog, fell backward—the weapon still planted in his heart.

CHAPTER XXVI.

NO NEWS IS BAD NEWS.

EARLY the next morning—much earlier than usual—Cleopatra rose from her couch. Her face was a little pale, and her eyes congested. The expression of her features was anxious, and she seemed somewhat exhausted. Whether these symptoms were the effect of excessive anxiety, pleasure, or the banquet, one thing was certain, she was restless, and less happy than usual.

“Iras,” said the Queen to her maid of honour, as the latter entered the Queen’s chamber to help her in her toilette, “Iras, no news this morning?”

“None, your Majesty.”

“What is the time, Iras?”

“Only two hours after sunrise, madam.”

“Well,” murmured the Queen to herself, “I am up at a very early hour this morning; they did not want to disturb me, we shall have news later on.”

Cleopatra began to pace her chamber up and down in a very anxious manner. In her movement she stood before an open window, and the fresh air blew into her face and invigorated her. The languid look about her eyes began to pass away. She recovered her vigour.

“Nothing kills time like toilette making; we shall have our bath first,” remarked Cleopatra.

The Queen and her maid of honour walked to the adjoining bath-room, the water was scented with several aromatic preparations. Half-an-hour afterwards the Queen was ready for her toilette.

As the maid of honour began arranging the Queen's black hair, "Look here, Iras," said her Majesty, "you mustn't arrange it so as to show much care has been bestowed upon it; my lord, Cæsar, likes my hair best when it is negligently arranged; he likes it to be as natural as possible. You must manage it in such a carefully careless way, that it appears as if no hand had touched it."

"The simplest and best way to do that, your Majesty, is not to touch it at all," answered Iras, good humouredly.

"You wicked creature! Well, go on and don't be in any hurry about it; you must prepare my toilette not only as being the Queen of Egypt, but the Queen of Rome. The Queen of Rome," repeated Cleopatra, laying much stress on the words, "do you hear me, you naughty beauty? If my hand will not wield the sceptre of Rome, it will be your fault."

"No amount of care in arranging your Majesty's toilette can make any difference; you are the Queen of beauty, madam, in any case; indeed," added the maid of honour, "I have a good mind to arrange nothing, for I don't believe it is possible either to add to, or take away any of, your charms."

"There is as much in cultivating beauty as in being endowed with it. We must always help nature by art; but no more of your nonsense now. Do your work quietly, but carefully, and remember that an empire is at stake in these critical moments."

And so the toilette went on, the Queen talking pleasantly and glibly as if she had passed the previous night in some noble

undertaking, and not in plotting the blackest crimes of which a human being is capable.

At the end of two hours all was ready.

"Well," said the Queen, looking at herself in a silver mirror, "if this doesn't win me the throne of Rome I don't know what would," and so saying she walked into her private saloon. But even then there was no news, and Cleopatra began to be anxious.

By noon-time she began to feel excessively uneasy.

"No news is bad news, Iras," said her Majesty, not far wrong in her theory. "These delays are always fatal. Such was the case in that unspeakable stormy night which cost me my throne for the time being. A far more important throne is lost if anything goes wrong in the present undertaking; unless these two men are removed I can never feel safe." And the Queen threw herself backward in her seat with gestures of impatience.

At last there *was* news. An officer in the guards entered into the presence of the Queen quite out of breath. His pale face and agitated look did not bespeak pleasant information.

"What's up?" asked the Queen, affecting absolute ignorance.

"I have bad news to give your Majesty," answered the officer, trembling.

"Well, speak and be quick," retorted Cleopatra, not being any more able to contain her anxiety.

"Murder, your Majesty, murder!"

"Egyptians or Romans?"

"Both Egyptians and Romans."

The face of the Queen brightened up, and a feeling of victory gave more lustre to her eyes. She did not care a

fig how many Egyptians were killed provided the two impertinent Romans, who were in her way, had been removed, which she inferred to be the case from the officer's story.

"How many were killed?"

"Six Egyptians and three Romans."

"Good!" murmured the Queen to herself, "they are lost."

"Go in all haste and fetch Septimius, the head of my guards, to be here at once."

"Alas! Septimius is no more."

"What do you say?" asked Cleopatra, her brow clouded with a black frown.

"Alas! Septimius is among the murdered."

"Is he murdered, too?"

"It is so, madam."

"Who else is murdered?"

"Two other Romans and six Egyptians, all in the guard of your Majesty.

Her face turned deathly pale, and a spasm of pain passed over it.

"Are there no other Romans murdered?" forgetting in her agitation that she was committing herself.

"None, your Majesty."

"Wretch! are you sure of what you say?"

"Unfortunately, too sure. I am just back from inspecting the bodies."

"What did you see? Describe all."

"A few hours ago," began the officer, "a rumour spread out in town of horrible murder committed in the suburbs, until the news at last reached the palace. It was of such

a horrible description that we all thought there was exaggeration, but, nevertheless, I and some other guards set out to walk to the spot."

"Well, what did you see there?"

"On the road leading to the Roman Camp," resumed the officer, "there is a narrow spot which was the scene of the crime. Nine bodies are stretched lifeless on the ground with ghastly faces, mutilated limbs, and horrible wounds on their bodies. All were dead with a pool of congealed blood round them."

"And Septimius?"

"This is the saddest of all, madam; Septimius was stretched on his back dead, with his right arm cut off, and a dagger—his own dagger, madam, for I well know it—planted in his heart up to the very hilt, and there it was left planted—here it is!" and the man produced the weapon all besmeared with blood.

Cleopatra looked at it in a terrified manner and turned more deathly pale, if that was possible. Round the handle was a piece of parchment, on which was written two Roman words in blood—*Justice—Revenge*.

"You could get no more news?"

"Two high officers in noble Cæsar's service are also reported to be fatally wounded and are dying; they are Brutus and Lucilius by name."

Cleopatra drew a deep sigh of relief; her colour came back by degrees, and her intense anxiety passed away.

"If this last report is true," murmured she to herself, "this slight loss is nothing. The way to thrones are always sprinkled with blood. Why should this be an exception?"

"You have done your duty well," said the Queen turning to the officer, "and now you may retire."

The officer bowed low as he respectfully saluted the Queen, and quitted the royal saloon.

"I told you no news is bad news, Iras," ejaculated Cleopatra to her maid of honour; but we hope the two insolent Romans perished in the struggle, and thus the secret is buried with the dead—the dead tell no tales! But I regret the loss of Septimius—he was a useful man."

CHAPTER XXVII.

UNDER THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

AT a little distance from the Roman Camp stood two big tents ; at the door of one of them were two sentinels standing with javelins in their hands. Inside were two beds, set close to each other, and on them stretched two figures. Their bandaged limbs and sides, stained with fresh blood, which covered their linen and bed as well, obviously showed that they were severely wounded men, while their pale faces and slow irregular breathing, indicated that there had been a very dangerous loss of blood.

Between the two beds sat an elderly man with a few drugs and instruments. The articles revealed his profession. Near the door of the tent sat a negro on a chair, grim and silent.

The morning light brought no change on the scene. The two wounded men, who were no other than Brutus and Lucilius, still lay motionless. Their faces appeared more ghastly, if that was possible, and their eyes were lustreless. If it were not for the faint irregular breathing, the two stretched figures might have been taken for two corpses, ready for burial.

The surgeon rose gently from his seat, looked into the eyes of the one, felt his pulse, and then to the other, and a shadow of gloom passed over his face.

“ Is there no hope, Trajan ? ” asked the negro, with a sad look which bespoke intense anxiety.

The surgeon simply shook his head.

"None at all?" repeated the negro with a sigh.

"None, as far as human judgment goes, but as long as they breathe there is life, and as long as there is life we have hope. Our destinies are in higher hands."

Every half-hour wine and milk were poured down the throats of the invalids and swallowed mechanically. Despite all these discouragements, the good surgeon never tired or despaired in his work. Like a messenger of goodness and love, he sat patiently and perseveringly watching over the wounded. Towards mid-day signs of returning life manifested themselves in Lucilius; a long deep moan was heard, followed by a slight movement; his eyes slowly opened, and seemed to look about the tent in a wandering manner.

"Brutus! Brutus!" whispered the sick man in a faint voice. "Where is Brutus?"

The surgeon, with a face radiant with joy, sprang up from his place and stepped towards the wounded man, putting his hand on his forehead, as if trying to appease his anxiety. Lucilius stretched his arms as if in the act of embracing, then, with an amazed look, he suddenly stopped.

"Who are you?" asked he in an astonished air. "This is not Brutus. Where is he, where is he?"

The surgeon, with a sad gesture of the hand, simply pointed to the bed, close by, on which lay Brutus.

"Heavens!" cried Lucilius, as he perceived the pale blanching figure of his friend. "Good gods! is he dead? My brave, beloved friend, is he dead?"

"Don't work yourself up into fury, good man," said the physician. "You will simply kill yourself, without doing your friend the least amount of good. You are in a very critical

condition, and great excitement may destroy the last chance of recovery. Be calm, my good sir, be calm."

"Tell me, tell me, is he dead? Oh, how pale he is! Are these noble features chilled by the hand of death?"

"He lives, noble Lucilius, he lives."

The soldier looked up into the surgeon's face with a bewildered air, but he saw no deceit in his honest eyes, and then drawing a deep sigh, he cried "Water! water!" trying to moisten his parched lips with his tongue, which was almost as dry. "Water! I am dying of thirst."

A cup of water was handed to him, which he greedily emptied. "More water," cried he. "I feel a devouring flame in my side; give me water."

Another cup was handed him, and the poor wounded man applied it to his lips, and swallowed every drop of it, heaving a pleasant sigh as he finished it.

"Now," said the physician, "not a word more; talking will excite you and re-open your wounds afresh. See, there!" cried the physician as the wound began to bleed, "by Jupiter, you are going to spoil all my work," and he loosened the bandage, applied a wet piece of clean cloth pressed tightly against his side, then bandaged it again.

Lucilius resigned himself to fate, and his physician. He soon fell asleep, his breathing getting a little more regular, while his paleness gave way to a faint rosy tinge on the cheeks.

Twelve hours passed before he woke up again. The scene was now quite different; the light of day had long since disappeared. A feeble light was dimly burning in the tent.

There was no physician in the tent, but in his place sat the young negro, who was not there when Lucilius first came back to consciousness. The face, hands, and feet of the negro were

as black as pitch ; his eyes were more piercing and intelligent-looking than those of a negro ; and, unlike that of a black man his mouth was small and his lips thin and beautifully shaped. Although he tried to look simple and dull there was a certain amount of dignity about him which he could not very well disguise. He was the surgeon's assistant.

Lucilius looked round about, and to his intense astonishment, Brutus was no more lying like a corpse ; his pallor had disappeared. His face was flushed, and his eyes bloodshot and wild. He moved restlessly about.

"It will never be," murmured Brutus in delirium. "No, by all the gods of Rome, it shall never be !"

"What does he say ?" inquired Lucilius from the assistant.

"He is delirious ; he is talking out of his senses," answered the young negro.

"That accursed woman to be the Queen of the Romans ! Bah ! never ! not even if ten Cæsars backed her ambition. I will run my sword through him and every tyrant that conspires against the loftiest nation in the world."

The negro, with a sad smile on his lips, and sparks of fire in his eyes, walked towards the wounded man, and gently laid his black hand upon the white forehead of the officer. "Here is some water," he said, applying a small cup to his lips. The soldier mechanically swallowed the liquid.

"To reign *with us* !" he went on. "Are we all dogs of Romans that he should speak thus in our presence ? Has all the courage and valour of Rome melted away before a single tyrant ? Oh ! I conjure you, brave Romans that rest nobly in your graves, to come and witness our degradation ! Where art thou Fabius ? Where art thou Scipio ? Where

art thou Pompey? Dear Pompey, where art thou? They are all dead, and Rome is dead with them."

As the wounded spoke sharp rigors ran through his body.

"Repeat one word," said Lucilius to the negro, "repeat one word of what you hear, and by the gods of Rome, wounded as I am, my sword will run through your body. Do you understand me, sir?"

"That monster of a Queen to reign in Rome!" continued the patient, "to squander the wealth and riches of the Capitol upon her lusts, to trample the Republic under her pride, to enslave the nation which enslaved the world, to tread under her feet the freedom of the fatherland—dare they do that! Rome may be aslumber, but not dead."

"Put your hand on his mouth," said Lucilius to the assistant, "he may talk all kinds of nonsense."

"His noble soul speaks out, even in delirium," remarked the young negro, as he applied a cloth, wet with vinegar and water, on the burning temples of the young officer.

"Remember you are here," resumed Lucilius, "to attend to the sick, and not meddle in politics, my young statesman. Although you shall be amply rewarded for your services, I may have to cudgel you if you intrude in things which you know nothing about."

The negro repressed a smile as he turned his back to get another drop of water for the wounded.

"And yet," remarked the assistant, as he took back the cup, "great men speak wisdom even in their delirium."

Lucilius lifted up his eyes towards this strange intruder, and was not a little struck with the noble bearing of the young fellow. His hands, though black, were delicate; his nose

sharply cut, and his movements graceful. Nevertheless, Lucilius resented his intrusion at the present grave crisis.

"You can use your hands as often as you choose," said Lucilius, "but I strongly advise you to make as little use of your tongue as possible."

"I have been ordered by the surgeon, my master, to insist upon the same injunction to your lordship," replied the negro. "While talking is only intrusion on my part it is imminent risk on yours, my lord."

Lucilius looked strangely at the fellow, but held his peace.

After his delirious burst of passion Brutus became quiet. Now and then a flash of intelligence brightened his face, but he always relapsed into a dull feverish stupor.

Morning brought with it no relief. The reaction, which did not manifest itself so soon as with Lucilius, was retarded, simply to set in with more violence. Fever was very high, the skin almost burning to the touch, the eyes became purple-red with congestion, and the veins at the temples alarmingly conspicuous. The patient tossed himself about in obvious distress.

Both patients seemed to get worse and worse every day. The fever got so high that for several days they lay unconscious. This terrible fire did its terrible work in their system, so that when it abated it left them a perfect wreck. Extreme depression was now the most prominent symptom. The two young men, who were once strong and vigorous, were now two helpless emaciated figures, stretched like mere skeletons, with the ghastly shadow of death hanging over them.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE NEGRO.

THE care and devotion of the surgeon and his negro assistant knew no bounds. The latter, in spite of the prospect of being well cudgeled by Lucilius, spent days and nights beside their beds administering medicine and nourishment. His sad face and deep grief, as the flame of life was flickering under the cruel fever, were very pathetic. Even when the last ray of hope seemed to fade away from the surgeon's mind the negro seemed not to despair. Patient and persevering, he kept on watching, nursing, and loving. Nothing but devotion to his duty sustained his strength, and nothing but love to the wounded sustained his hope. And his love and devotion had their reward at last. First one and then the other passed the crisis, and were rescued from the clutch of death. Their stupor, like a thick cloud, began to clear off. Consciousness once more came back to them. The assistant was overjoyed when the bright intelligent eyes looked again into his black face, and their voices were heard again.

"A strange dream!" said Brutus, as the negro lay stretched between their beds, "a very strange dream!"

"What is it?" asked Lucilius, smilingly.

"I found myself," began Brutus, "transported into a strange land. Before me lay an extensive piece of ground, full of green trees and beautiful flowers. Behind me rose high mountains, corrugated with deep valleys, while before me

rolled on a mighty river—a voluminous mighty deep river, the like of which I never saw in my life. It ran smoothly and noiselessly, and everything around me was calm and silent.”

“It was a charming place,” remarked Lucilius, laughingly.

“On the opposite shore,” went on Brutus, not heeding his friend’s remark, “it was all dull and hazy. A dreadful mist extended all over the boundary line and hid the view from my sight, and I could see or hear nothing.

“I sat down on a stone admiring this charming view and meditating over a thousand things, when suddenly, to my surprise, I saw a boat on the opposite shore. A man of strong muscular build was rowing hard and fast in it.

“The boat seemed to glide like an arrow on the current, until it touched the shore to my side. The man, tying his boat with a rope to a little tree close by, jumped out ashore and directed his steps towards me.”

The narrator took a long breath, as if trying to gather more strength to finish his story.

“Well?” asked Lucilius, getting more and more interested in his friend’s story.

“Well,” resumed the narrator, “the man walked straight up to me. As he arrived at the spot where I was sitting, he suddenly stopped. He was a man past the middle age of life, with shaggy hair and brows; a sad, pathetic dignity on his noble face, while his eyes seemed like two flames of fire.”

The negro, in his feigned sleep, moved restlessly about, but always keeping his eyes well shut.

“Who are you?” went on Brutus. “‘Who are you?’ said I to him.

“‘You ask who I am,’ answered the figure in a reproachful

way, but full of dignity. His words seemed to dart arrows into my heart. I looked on and on, without ever being able to make out who this strange man was. I felt as if I knew him, yet I knew him not.

“‘I know you not,’ said I at last to the man. His large eyes became soft, and I fancied they were wet with tears.”

Another time the feigned sleeper moved restlessly about, and was then still.

“‘Well, well,’ said the noble figure to me, ‘it happens often that when a great man falls his friends desert him, but I never dreamt they would forget his identity.’ Then I felt as if scales came down from my eyes, when I could well see who the man speaking to me was. Could you guess, Lucilius, who that noble figure was?”

“I confess I am quite at a loss,” answered the latter.

“He was no other than noble Pompey!” said Brutus, with much emotion.

Two big tears rolled unheeded down the cheeks of the negro.

“‘Is there no honour and valour left in Rome?’ thundered Pompey’s voice in my ears. ‘Rome is to be enslaved by the tyrant, and you are still alive, Brutus? Know you not that the gods themselves are looking down from Olympus with contempt upon the cowardly Romans? For shame! for shame! All the noble hearts have departed from Rome. All valour has deserted the dear old Capitol. In vain has Minerva interceded with Jupiter for your sake. The gods will help only those who help themselves. Rise, Brutus. Rise and strike for liberty and freedom. Snap the tyrant’s chains, strike for your gods and country, strike for your honour and nation, or live a slave’s life and die a traitor’s death!’

"I tried to speak, but my tongue cleaved to the roof of my mouth. As I tried to follow his retreating steps he looked back at me with much sadness and compassion.

" 'You can never come with me, my son,' said he to me. 'Those that cross that silent but deep river of Death are allowed to return here no more. Once there,' continued he with a grim smile, pointing his finger towards the misty shore, 'once there, always there.' Your feet have almost touched that noiseless, but fatal river, but the gods chose to spare your life for a noble aim. Remember the gods are henceforward watching your career; let it be great and noble!'—and thus speaking, the figure hurried back towards the river.

"As he sat again in his boat he threw at me once more a look full of grief and affection. I can never forget that look, it will haunt me all my life."

The narrator moved from his side to his back as he finished relating his dream. Being still delicate and weak, he felt much exhausted with the effort.

Lucilius was greatly affected with what he heard, but, prudently, tried not to encourage a conversation which would lead to injurious emotions.

"It is a wonderful dream," said he. "It looks more like an inspiration from the gods; but you have already talked too much. Be calm, and have some rest now."

Several hours passed, and the day was declining towards its close, when a flourish of trumpets and clatter of horses' hoofs was heard. Scarcely had the wounded time to inquire into the cause, when the comely and noble figure of Cæsar stepped in. His face was bright and serene, his eyes soft and sympathetic, and his carriage dignified and manly. There was impressed upon his features that air of true grandeur which

never forsook him, and which indicated genuine greatness touched with generosity.

As Cæsar stepped in he came face to face with the negro, who had just ran to the tent door to ascertain the cause of the noise. As their eyes met the negro turned deadly pale under his black colour at this unexpected sight, and his right hand involuntarily went to his left side, as if in the act of grasping a weapon that used to be there. His eyes looked fiercely wild, while intense excitement showed itself upon his face; but such emotions are hard to read under a black skin. Without taking the slightest notice of him, Cæsar walked right into the tent.

"My brave lads," he began, as he seated himself between the two wounded officers, "you have been laid up in beds with dangerous wounds all this while, and I knowing nothing about it till to-day. Great gods!" he cried, as he looked at their pale faces and wasted forms, "how changed you are!" and with sincere tenderness he bent over the forehead of Brutus, on which he impressed a tender kiss, afterwards saluting Lucilius in the same fashion.

A blush of shame and self-reproach passed over the face of Brutus like a red evening cloud. Cæsar ever loved Brutus with a tenderness and affection which was almost paternal, and this was perhaps the main reason which gave rise to the scandalous story that Brutus was a natural son of Cæsar. History and common-sense reject the story with scorn, as the latter was no more than fifteen years the former's senior.

"And so you have had a night adventure?" remarked Cæsar.

"An amusing adventure!" answered Brutus, trying to stifle his emotion.

"It was so amusing that it almost cost you your lives, I am afraid; but the Roman swords were victorious here as everywhere," said Cæsar.

"It must always be so, or else what is the use of being a Roman?" retorted Brutus.

"Brave men!" muttered Cæsar, half to himself, half to the two friends.

"And the scoundrels had such an instructing lesson that they will never try the same game again; but what in the world made these madmen attack you?" continued the General, who was kept all this time in placid ignorance of the whole affair by the precautions of the wily Queen. "Was it a love affair? You know Charmion and Iras are rare beauties. Such delicate creatures," went on Cæsar, in good humour, "are mighty motives for struggles, not only between individuals, but nations. Delicate and powerless as they seem to be, they often change the history of the world!"

How wisely Cæsar could speak when no passion or ambition clouded his wisdom!

"I don't deal much in love," remarked Brutus, "and when I have a tendency in that direction it will be with the daughters of Rome."

"Daughters of Rome or daughters of Egypt, they all belong to that soft sex which works our happiness and destruction alike. And how are you getting on now, my lads?" he asked, after a moment's pause.

"Famously," answered Lucilius.

"I am delighted to hear it. We cannot spare such brave fellows like you. You must be home-sick now, and it will be cheerful news for you to hear that we shall soon go to Rome!"

“Indeed !” cried both officers, scarcely believing their ears.

“Indeed, and no mistake. It is all very well to settle other nations’ affairs, but it is more urgent to attend to our own business.”

“This is decidedly good news,” answered Brutus, “I feel I can leave my bed now.”

“Rumours come from Spain that a storm is gathering there—by the bye,” cried Cæsar, as if suddenly recollecting something, “do you know whom we had here lately for a guest ?”

“Who ?” cried both friends.

“No less a personage than Sextus Pompeius ! and, what is more astonishing still, he had the audacity to enter the royal palace in disguise.”

“Impossible !” shouted both Brutus and Lucilius.

The negro’s eyes flashed lightning, and he looked about the tent, his eyes resting upon the swords hanging over the patients’ beds.

“Rumour went,” continued Cæsar, “that a muffled man in the capacity of a Parthian envoy entered the palace as a guest to that banquet in which we had so much wine and fun,” said Cæsar, with a careless smile. “But no Parthian chief made his appearance : like a phantom he came in and like a phantom he went out.”

“What for did he enter the palace ?” asked Lucilius, breathlessly.

“It was a love affair ; didn’t I tell you that woman is the source of all mischiefs and dangers. Well, while we had our pleasures at the banquet, he had his with the Princess Arsino.”

Lucilius and Brutus exchanged looks of utter wonder and amazement, while the negro shivered.

“May I ask how you came in possession of this secret, not-

withstanding the phantom-like appearance and disappearance of Sextus?" asked Brutus, with anxiety.

"Well, it takes a woman to catch a woman, and the Queen found out her sister's secret. It was found out by a long zig-zag way, but women's ways are always zig-zag, you know."

"And then?" inquired Brutus.

"And then Sextus disappeared after the banquet like a charmed spirit."

Brutus suddenly brought his hand to his forehead, as if in the act of remembering something vague that had come across his path.

"The Queen," continued the General, "was so much enraged at the intrigue of the Princess that her first impulse was to have her beheaded."

The negro now actually made a step towards the General, but conscious of his rashness, and hearing Cæsar go on in his story, he stopped.

"I could not consent to that," resumed Cæsar; "I cannot bear to see the blood-shedding of a young, beautiful Princess because she is in love. We are all in love, and therefore we can sympathise with our fellow-creatures who have the same weakness."

"The only feasible way to save the life of the Princess is to make her follow our triumph to Rome. This will soften the Queen's anger at Arsino's late effort to usurp the throne, and at the same time put the young Princess in a comparatively safe place from her sister's wrath."

"Well done, my lord!" said Lucilius.

"Cæsar is not so bad," went on the General, "as his enemies paint him. Determination and recklessness mark me

in battles, but kindness and generosity is my motto in victory. If Sextus would only come and throw himself on my honour, Cæsar's arms are ready to receive him and administer a soothing balsam to his wounds. We are all the toys of Fate, and we must shape our fortunes as the hand of Destiny decrees. But I have already been here too long. Your physician asked me to stay and talk as little as possible. These eccentric physicians," said Cæsar, laughing as he rose to quit the tent, "respect neither officer nor General, and their orders must be obeyed."

Embracing the wounded once more, he retraced his steps.

"What a strange apparition!" exclaimed Brutus, putting his emaciated hand to his forehead as Cæsar left the tent.

"What is it?"

"A most puzzling affair; it must have been he, it must have been he," repeated Brutus in an abstracted manner.

"What are you talking about?" asked Lucilius, alarmed that his friend might be again in delirium.

"I cannot solve this riddle otherwise, and yet how strange at such a time and such a place!"

"Are you delirious, Brutus?"

"No, not a bit, I am only trying to solve a vague mystery, a strange apparition."

"What is it?"

"You remember, Lucilius, when we were engaged with our adversaries, how you, with your hands pressed against your wounds, enjoined me to save myself, remarking at the same time that your wounds were mortal?"

His friend inclined his head in the affirmative.

"Well, you fainted away soon, and after that I found myself engaged with two of those rascals, whom, however, I

despatched; but the only survivor came forward. As he reached me I, for the first time, found myself soaked with my own blood. A sick feeling came over my heart, and scarcely had I moved my sword when my head got dizzy, my eyes became misty, there was an awful ringing in my ears, and I fell to the ground. I could see like a half-conscious man, but I could neither speak nor move. I saw a sharp blade flash in the faint light before my eyes, and then I lost all consciousness, only I imagined I saw and heard a man who interposed between me and my fate. Who that man was or what he said I could not tell; but, nevertheless, I imagined I felt, instead of a blade piercing my heart, a tender kiss imprinted upon my forehead, and all was darkness again."

Lucilius became reflective but made no remark, while a smile passed over the face of the negro.

"It is all a puzzle to me," said Lucilius, after a few moments' pause, "somebody must have intervened to save your life and mine, or surely the sword of that cowardly wretch would have been plunged into your heart and mine."

"If only I could get that mystery cleared up" remarked Brutus. "How is it that the man who rushed with his drawn sword to finish us both was among the dead, while you and I were then helplessly lying like corpses? I would give ten years of my life to get this mystery solved."

In the meantime the negro slipped into the adjoining tent, but after a few minutes he was back again into his post of duty.

"Give me another draught of milk and wine, my young negro," said Brutus, addressing him in an indifferent manner, but, as he looked up, he was not there.

There before them, with a loving look and a sweet, sad smile, stood the haughty, resolute figure of Sextus Pompey.

Lucilius gazed wildly on like a man in a nightmare, his eyes rested on the strange apparition, while Brutus fell back fainting in the arms of his deliverer !

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

THE day which the great man appointed to leave his earthly Paradise arrived at last. Neither Cleopatra's arts, nor tears, nor entreaties, nor feigned illness at his departure, could persuade Julius Cæsar to prolong his stay in that poisoned atmosphere of Alexandria. Those artful measures which were destined in the future to ruin the glorious career of another great man, who might have been a second Cæsar, had no effect upon the Roman leader.

Perhaps never was Cæsar so great in his moral courage and firm resolution as he appeared to be at this critical moment. Here was a charming woman, a charming queen whom he loved with all the strength and passion of manhood, entreating him, with tears in her captivating eyes and sadness on her beautiful cheeks, not to break her heart ; but Cæsar had already gathered experiences enough in this world to know that though apparently delicate, the heart of a woman is tough tissue after all. It is the last thing to *break* on this earth of ours, and, if that sad, but rare, accident ever happens, it is no sooner broken than mended again. He loved Cleopatra, and loved her dearly with all the emotion of his soul. To unbind these entangling ties, to unwind this complicated net, to yield to the voice of judgment in preference to that of passion, was one of Cæsar's noblest acts. Not all his numerous victories in war could compare with this triumph of will, for Cæsar was most victor-

ious when he could conquer himself. Duty and honour called him to Rome, and to Rome he would go; the path of glory was clear before him, and that path he would take. O, reader! if you can conquer this most powerful and most asserting of all human passions for the sake of duty and honour, depend upon it, you are a great man, but what is much better than that, you are a *noble* man.

The bustle inside the palace, and the measured step of the soldiers marching here and there, clearly indicated that active preparations were being taken for immediate departure. Horsemen were galloping about, a continuous stream of soldiers and porters extended from the palace to the harbour; the ships were lying there with their sails up, ready for departure; innumerable boats were in readiness close the shore. The population of Alexandria hurried to the spot to witness the scene, and the confusion and noise, unavoidable on such occasions, filled the air.

Suddenly there was a dead silence inside and round the palace, and, at last, the great man appeared at the gates. He looked more majestic than usual. With his high, towering stature and noble features, he seemed born to command and rule. His face bore an exceptionally dignified air, tempered with a gentle look. His long sword hung down his left side, and he wore a suit of Tyrian purple, laced with gold and studded with precious stones. Beside him came Cleopatra, beautiful, but sad. In her grief she looked even more charming than in her happy moments. Her face was softened, and her long eyelashes drooping. Still, it is seldom the sadness of a woman interferes with her vanity. Like Cæsar, she wore a Tyrian purple dress—the same she had on at that fatal banquet; the same jewels were there, with some more rare ones added

to them. Her mien was noble, and her dignity quite matched that of Cæsar's.

Along the road between the palace and the harbour were two lines of Egyptian soldiers with javelins in their hands. The moment the Queen and the General made their appearance all arms were lifted up saluting them. They both occupied an ornamented litter carried by several black men. Round them were Cæsar's most intimate officers, first and foremost Brutus and Lucilius. The former regarded the Queen with hatred more easily imagined than described, while he looked upon the General with a mixed feeling of pity and love. The two young Romans had already regained health, but the effect of their wounds was still visible on their faces, especially that of Brutus, which, pale by nature, looked now all the paler.

As Cæsar and Cleopatra were carried in the litter the two friends exchanged a meaning look, but silently rode on by the litter between the two lines of soldiers who always held their arms in a saluting attitude. The General and his love occupied their time in low whispered conversation, while the eyes of the Queen were seen bedewed with tears. At last they arrived at the harbour. The crowd was eager to take a look at the departing great man, and when he arrived perfect stillness reigned. It was the hush of curiosity and pain.

Cæsar's army had already embarked, and only his principal officers remained who were now surrounding his person.

The litter stopped, and the lovers stepped out of it with graceful agility. All was ready for departure, and nothing hindered but the order of the great man, and the order of the great man was given. All the other passengers were embarked—all, except one. In a little boat touching the shore was seated a lady, very beautiful and very young. Her dress

of white silk was very simple. She had no ornaments on her whatever, except a thin gold chain that was attached to her delicate feet. With dignified resignation she surveyed the crowd. Towards this unfortunate personage the Queen made her way, and, standing close by, she surveyed her with infinite satisfaction.

“My dear sister,” began the Queen, in a mocking gesture, forgetting her own grief, “what a great ornament you must be to Cæsar’s retinue! All Rome must admire your beauty when you arrive there.”

“It is not much to Cæsar’s honour,” answered the young lady, with a dignity approaching haughtiness, “it is not much to Cæsar’s honour that a weak girl should adorn his triumph. It were more befitting his glory if my place were occupied by a brave warrior who had wielded a sword against him in the field of battle.”

The Queen was obviously piqued at this answer, but outwardly seemed indifferent.

“And you have no jewels on you!” resumed the Queen, tauntingly. “We never deprived you of them. You should put them on as befits a princess of the royal blood; your arrival at the Roman Capitol will produce more effect with them than without them.”

“I have never aimed at effects,” answered the Princess, casting down her eyes.

“But you should aim at them, Arsino. It is not becoming that a member of our royal house should appear thus before the Romans. Put on your jewels, sister, put them on!”

“I have one that is ever brilliant,” answered the Princess, with a noble air.

“Which? I see none.”

"Virtue, your Majesty—virtue," and Arsino looked searchingly and boldly into the Queen's face.

There was no blush on it. Cleopatra had long since ceased to blush at her errors.

"It is quite inconceivable," retorted the Queen, "that a princess should speak of virtue when she receives in her chamber Parthian envoys, and accords them audience in the dead of night."

"Love, madam, is the basest sentiment when vile, but the noblest when pure," and the young Princess modestly cast down her eyes, her face crimson with blushes.

"You forget you have another ornament besides virtue. Virtue adorns the heart, but you have another to adorn your feet."

Arsino bore the Queen's cutting sarcasm patiently, but at this last cruel remark tears sprang into her eyes, and she covered her face with a silk handkerchief.

"For heaven's sake, row on," she said to the head boatman.

"I have brought tears into her eyes at last," said the Queen to herself, as she made a sign with her hand to the sailors to go on. By this time Cæsar, who had been engaged in conversation with his officers, walked towards them.

Cleopatra's face brightened up a bit now; she had caused mortification to Arsino, and this gave her immense pleasure—for she never felt so happy as when she had made somebody else miserable.

Cæsar was giving his last instructions to the captain of the fleet, when chance brought Brutus near the presence of the Queen. Ever since the time of that memorable banquet,

they had never met until to-day. Cleopatra was confident that the two wounded Romans knew nothing about the real instigator of the crime, while the two friends, on their part, took good care not to divulge that secret so long as they remained on Egyptian soil.

"And how have you liked our shores during the period you have spent with us?" asked the Queen, with a pleasant smile and an air full of gentleness and innocence.

"You have wonderful shores, madam," answered Brutus.

"We hope you carry pleasant memories with you to your mother land."

"Very pleasant, indeed," answered the young officer, bowing.

"And so you will always remember our charming city?"

"Is it possible to forget such a paradise? Our friendship to it has been sealed with our blood, madam," and Brutus looked hard into the Queen's face. Her colour changed, and she involuntarily winced under the eye of the Roman.

"It grieved us very much to hear of the accident that befell you, and the assassins would surely have paid with their blood the penalty of their crime, but they have deservedly met their fate."

"It is exceedingly kind of your Majesty."

"If you had stayed a little longer in our city, you would have received high marks of our favour."

"I assure you, madam, that we carry with us marks of your Majesty's favour which will last our lifetime."

The Queen, whether she understood or chose not to understand his meaning smiled complacently with wonderful self-control, and accepted his remark as a compliment.

Beside Cleopatra stood a boy scarcely fourteen years of

age. He had a fair complexion with sweet and gentle looks about him. He looked round about with the curiosity and innocence of his age. This little boy was no less a personage than the Queen's brother and the sharer in the kingdom. Her first brother, as has been already related, had perished in the struggle that ensued between him and Cæsar. To appease the temper of the Egyptians, the General appointed this second brother of the Queen—now the only male survivor of the Ptolomies—as her partner and husband, both titles being only for the sake of formality. The spirit of determination and self-independence which were essential parts of his deceased brother's character were totally absent in him. He was an accessory appendage to the throne, and as such he now stood at the side of his sister to play a little royal comedy, which was to end in the near future in royal tragedy.

As Brutus was engaged in conversation with the Queen, Cæsar, who had given his last instructions to the captain of the fleet, joined them, and, for the first time in this procession, took notice of the royal boy.

"My young friend," said Cæsar, tapping him on the shoulder, "you are still in a tender age, and consequently in need of a true counsellor and loving adviser. Beside you," and the General pointed to the Queen, "stands your best and truest friend. Whenever you need advice and protection, your royal consort is always ready to accord you both."

"I love her," uttered Ptolemy, in his boyish simplicity and innocence, running closer to his sister's side.

"Evildoers," went on Cæsar, "will try their best to alienate you from her, but you must always trust and love her."

"That I shall ever do."

"You are not yet of mature age to decide matters for yourself, and therefore you must let the Queen think and act for you until you become a man."

"I will always abide by that till I attain manhood, and then I can think and act for myself," answered the boy with a gentle laugh. He meant no witty answer, but uttered what came to his lips. Cæsar smiled, but Cleopatra opened her eyes just a little more than usual, reflected for a moment—and only a moment—and then resumed her usual demeanour.

The moment of departure had arrived at last, and all being quite ready, Cæsar took leave of his royal love. The cheeks of the Queen turned crimson-red in her strong emotion, and tears ran down her face in a continuous stream. She would have fainted if the occasion permitted, but as it was not consistent with her royal dignity to indulge in such a display, she tried to keep up her fortitude.

The sun was in its zenith when the ships, one by one, began to move over the waves. Cæsar, with his tall figure and purple suit, was seen standing on the deck of his ship waving his hand to his sweetheart. On sailed the flotilla, and Cleopatra, covering her face with her silk handkerchief, mounted her royal palanquin—her lover at her side no more.

Keep your tears back, beautiful Queen, keep them back. You shall have more need of them in the dark future!

CHAPTER XXX.

JEALOUSY CLOTHED WITH VIRTUE.

AMONG the palaces of Rome was one built upon a prominent hill. The grand furniture of the palace, and the number of slaves and servants in it, indicated clearly that it was occupied by somebody of importance and influence.

In one of the secluded chambers of this building sat a man in a meditative and troubled mood. He was past the middle age of life, of a thin pale face, and somewhat sallow complexion. There were a few gray hairs in his head; his eyes were a little sunken in their orbits, and their small size did not add to their beauty or lessen their sinister appearance.

He desired to be left alone, and this is why he chose to be in that secluded room. He was at home for nobody. His servants, being well acquainted with these fits of melancholy, which had increased of late, dared not disturb him in any way. He sat sulkily and moodily, with his face contracted in a peculiarly angry and unpleasant manner. His finger-nails were constantly between his teeth, working up and down in a saw-like movement. He occasionally brought his hand to his head, and then, in a restless manner, to his moustache, then forcing it into his mouth. After all these restless movements he would invariably bring his finger-nails in contact with his front teeth, and go on working at them for an indefinite length of time. His head was bent upon a plain table before him,

but on the table there was no parchment or any other article to occupy his mind. He was absorbed in meditation that seemed to be of a painful and disagreeable character.

Time went on, but he was unconscious of the lapse of time. The shrunken features of his face, with its sour sallow look, the occasional gnashing of teeth, and the repeated wild snarls, all indicated mortification at something which could not be easily divined.

At last he was startled by a sense of smarting pain, and, looking at his fingers, he discovered that the top parts of his nails had altogether disappeared, and that for some time he had been, in fact, digging his sharp teeth into the flesh, as the result of which a few drops of blood besmeared both fingers and lips. At this discovery he reluctantly relinquished his task, and, with his elbow resting on the table, and his head on his hand, he simply stared at the wall in a vague meaningless way.

But the monotony of this silence was eventually disturbed by the clatter of horses and the clang of steel, and the hum of a multitude passing on the road close by. The sulky man raised his head from his hand and his body from the chair, and walked slowly towards the window of his room, which overlooked the great high way leading to the Senate House.

The weather outside was dull and gloomy; a few clouds covered the sky, and a great mist was seen rolling slowly in the valleys far away. But nothing lessened the grandeur of the procession that was sweeping close by. A body of horsemen was riding swiftly on as heralds of a man far greater, and of much more importance, than the sulky one watching from the window. The former was no other than Julius Cæsar. In his military costume, and mounted on a jet black steed

he appeared, with his noble figure, an ideal picture of a brave warrior. At his side was Mark Antony, mounted on a grey horse, and now and then glancing at Cæsar with a proud look, full of love and admiration, while behind them came officials of different ranks and grades.

The pale, sallow man kept his eyes fixed upon the sweeping procession, his face getting paler and paler every moment. He lingered looking on until the last horseman disappeared in the far gloomy distance.

“This cannot be endured any longer,” murmured the man to himself, as he paced his chamber to and fro. “Is Julius Cæsar greater than Longinus Cassius? Is the ambition of my life to pass like a dream, while it is realised by this adventurer of a soldier? This desperado of a politician, rising step by step before my own eyes, increasing his influence month by month, and augmenting in grandeur year by year, in this the greatest city of the world! Oh, heavens! I can endure it no more. He is on the sure road to a dictatorship. I am only a legate. The great Cassius only a legate! No, no; it shall never be!” shrieked he again to himself, wringing his hands as he still kept pacing his room in a passion of rage and vexation.

On those distorted and distracted features of his there was one word written—it was *jealousy*—impotent jealousy. This man, who had the conceit to look upon himself as the greatest personage of his age, was Longinus Cassius. He was of the Pompeian faction, but, after the battle of Pharsalia, Cæsar, ever generous and magnanimous, pardoned him, and made him one of his principal legates. This, instead of filling his heart with gratitude and affection to his benefactor, served

only to stimulate his arrogance and conceit—to inflame him with jealousy and malice.

Great Cassius, after this burst of unprovoked indignation, resumed his seat on the chair, and once more, unconsciously to himself, began again with his sharp teeth on the fingernails of his left hand. But this time he was, happily for himself, soon disturbed. A low knock came at his door, and he at once rose, with anger and rage, to see who was the intruder who dared disturb his repose.

“Hallo!” he said, as the pale face of Brutus appeared at the door. “Come in, my dear brother, come in.”

“Good gracious!” cried Brutus, as he looked into the haggard face and distorted features of his brother-in-law, “what ails you, Cassius? You are so agitated. Has any mishap befallen you?”

“Agitated?” answered Cassius, as he offered Brutus a chair. “No wonder, my brother, no wonder. When one is enslaved one cannot help being agitated.”

“What is up, my dear Cassius? Has any unexpected calamity befallen our Capitol?”

“Has any calamity befallen our Capitol?” retorted Cassius, in a sneering and mocking manner. “You, a Roman, and not knowing that a great calamity is threatening the Capitol? You, Brutus, more than anybody else, should know better than this. What greater calamity can befall us than becoming slaves?”

“Becoming slaves!” uttered the bewildered Brutus. “And who dares make us slaves?”

“Who dares! There is one in Rome who dares, and has been daring everything for the last few years, and why not?”

There is no man to check his ambitious career. There is no patriot to curb his criminal aspirations. Step by step he mounts the ladder of tyranny, trampling under his feet our liberty and freedom, our laws and statutes, and Rome still slumbers! Julius Cæsar is enslaving Rome inch by inch, and she is unconsciously allowing herself to fall into the tyrant's clutch."

Brutus listened to his brother with something like sad sympathy. These reflections had more than once agitated his soul in Egypt, but after his arrival in Rome they began to lose power over him, until by degrees they faded away. Cæsar's kindness to him killed all these dark thoughts. Feeling the smart of his wound no more, and having long since quitted the poisonous atmosphere of Alexandria, he began to think more kindly of his benefactor, hoping, at the same time, that Cleopatra's memory would, by degrees, be effaced from Cæsar's mind, and that Rome would be no more in danger from her ambitious and criminal aspirations. He could forgive Cæsar all his ambitions short of turning the Republic into a Monarchy; but he could never forgive him taking as consort that wily and dangerous Egyptian Queen, who would surely lead him to take a step disastrous both to Rome and Cæsar. As there was no danger of that any more now, healthy and kindly thoughts towards Cæsar had taken the place of gloomy and dark projects.

"My dear Cassius," replied Brutus, after a pause, "treat Cæsar not harshly; it is no fault in him to be a great military genius. He has risen by his merits; and as to his ambitions, who lives without one? As long as these ambitions do not touch the freedom and laws of the nation, let him be ambitious. Besides, you and I owe him a great debt. We owe him both

life and rank, and it will be black ingratitude on our part if we should be the first to think unkindly of him."

"We are degenerating! We are degenerating!" iterated the virtuous Cassius, lifting up his arms in a supplicating attitude towards heaven. "If Cæsar wronged me I would surely forgive him, but to wrong Rome—what Roman, with a particle of honour, can forgive him?"

These words struck home into Brutus's heart. The wily Cassius knew only too well the pure and unaffected patriotism of his brother-in-law, and he was now trying to touch the right cord of his emotion. Let him only arouse Brutus's righteous anger and patriotism, and he was sure to have a patriotic screen for his sordid jealousy. Brutus became reflective. Cassius was talking in the same spirit, and with the same vehemence, he himself had manifested while on his way from that ill-omened banquet, but he did his best to forget these days of dark forebodings against his dear friend Cæsar—and now?—and now Cassius aroused the very same feeling he had striven so hard to forget.

"Be sure," replied Brutus, "that when Cæsar lifts his hand against the safety of Rome then Rome will look after herself."

"Rome will not look after herself if we don't look after her. Very few men are left in Rome who would be willing to risk life and all for the sake of the dear old Capitol."

"There is still a remnant of the old heroic Romans who will risk and hazard all when affairs take a desperate turn; be easy on the subject. I love Cæsar and esteem him, but I love and esteem Rome more than any being."

Cassius's contracted face relaxed; his frown disappeared, and, for the first time since he retired into that secluded room, a faint smile was seen on his features.

"Have you seen him going down to the Senate, a little while ago?" said he, anxiously.

"No," answered Brutus.

"Well, you should have seen him. He was just like a king going in State to his throne; a vast multitude of nobles attending him, like royal guards, only they are not honoured with this title yet. They fawn upon him like so many hounds, and yet—and yet Cæsar rides on without taking the slightest notice of them all."

"Whatever Cæsar's faults may be, he dislikes flattery."

"He dislikes flattery when it is called flattery, but clothe it with another name, and you find him relishing it as well as the rest of mortals. Tyrants always liked to be fawned at."

"Let him go to the Senate in as much pomp as possible," resumed Cassius. "Let him go to the Senate in as much pomp as he likes, only he should not touch the old prerogatives of the nation."

"The moment he does that he is a dead man!"

"You speak like yourself now, Brutus; you talk like a noble Roman. I can depend upon you, then, when the State is endangered?"

"Most decidedly, Cassius; most decidedly."

Cassius's face brightened up with a malignant smile of triumph.

While the two friends were thus cherishing dark designs, the great man, who was the subject of their discussion, was fighting hard for them in the Senate. He proposed two posts of honour and influence for them, but as both Brutus and

Cassius once belonged to the Pompeian faction, Cæsar met with great opposition from his own party, but his weight and influence carried everything before them.

That very evening, as Brutus was supping with Cassius, a hard knock came at the door, and an officer, with his sword clanging behind him, hurriedly mounted the steps. It was Mark Antony, with his honest face beaming with delight and gladness.

“Good news!” he cried, as he stepped into the dining hall. “Good news!” drawing, at the same time, two pieces of parchment from his bosom, and handing them to the two brothers.

The two friends read the parchments, and looked at one another dumb-founded. Brutus was appointed Governor of Cæsalpine Gauls, and Cassius was made Praetor Peregrinum, with a promise to have the Governorship of Syria later on.

Brutus turned crimson with shame and self-reproach, while Cassius became deathly pale. The mean and ungrateful spirit of the latter looked upon every fresh favour from Cæsar as a gross insult.

A week later Brutus, surrounded with a body of horsemen, was seen to leave the gate of Rome, on his way to his province, amid the cheers of the Romans, and the good wishes of Cæsar.

The moment he was out of the Capitol he gave a deep sigh of relief.

“I am free now,” murmured he to himself, as he dashed his spurs into the horse’s sides. “I am now far from the reach of dark designs and black ingratitude against the generous benefactor who has been more than a tender father to me. O, how can I repay his affection?”

Hurry on, unfortunate young man, hurry on, and talk of gratitude as little as possible. Your debt to your benefactor you shall pay, and in a manner which will be stamped on the face of history for ever !

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE VICTOR EVER VICTORIOUS.

CASSIUS was not far wrong when he predicted that Cæsar was on the sure road to dictatorship. On that sure road he certainly was, and a dictator he was appointed. But the more his glory shone the more generous and gentle he became. He is back now from the African continent. Scipio and Cato, who still adhered to the Pompeian cause, were strengthening their force and position, and threatened to be a source of anxiety. Accordingly, Cæsar set out with his brave army. The fatal battle of Thapsus left no hope to the Pompeians in the dark continent. Cato of Utica, hearing of the disastrous end, ordered a grand banquet to be prepared, and, after much feasting, spent the night in reading Plato's *Phædo*, after which he stabbed himself in the breast.

Cæsar's entry into the Capitol was celebrated with unusual pomp and grandeur. His victories were celebrated by four successive triumphs, the like of which had not been witnessed since the time of Scipio Africanus. At the end of these triumphs Cæsar lavished his hospitality on the Roman people. The last memorable day was that one which history has handed down to our times. More than twenty thousand tables were spread in the streets of the great Metropolis, and thousands upon thousands of soldiers and citizens sat down at them to enjoy the hospitality of the great man.

Two hours in the afternoon, in the midst of these festivals,

two figures, with their swords at their sides, and their visors pulled tightly down their foreheads, were seen passing the crowd from one quarter to another, and studying the conversation and sentiments of the multitude. The one was a lean, thin man: you might think there was no flesh upon him; he was all skin and bones. His face under his visor was pale and gaunt, two tiger-like eyes were seen peering behind their brass shield, a few wrinkles were inscribed on his fox-like face, and his nose was hooked down and pointed at the end. He moved hither and thither like a shadow, while his feet had a stealthy step. His companion was no other than the virtuous and patriotic Cassius, who was so anxious to reform Rome and the Roman world. The two men crossed the crowded streets. There was no fixed spot towards which they directed their steps; they only wanted to study the people, and a multitude of people there was to study everywhere.

“May the gods save the Dictator!” said a strong Roman, who did full justice to the meat he was devouring before him at the table; “there has been no one so great as Julius Cæsar ever since Rome was founded.”

“And such hospitality!” remarked a bulky figure by his side. “This is royal munificence, royal magnificence, royal generosity!” he added, in a noisy, boisterous voice.

The two friends exchanged a meaning look.

“Royal munificence?” joined in a third man, while separating a chicken leg with his fingers. “Tell me of a king in the extent of the whole world who ever showed such hospitality to his subjects. It is such men that Rome needs, my dear sir, such men,” continued he, swallowing a goblet of wine, “none of your austere and sulky citizens who hate every man in

power. That skeleton of a Casca dared criticise the Dictator openly, while the latter was engaged with his enemies in Africa ; well, upon my word," continued he, emptying another draught of wine, "if that gaunt fox was here to-day, I would break every bone in his blessed body."

Cassius's companion gave an involuntary wince, and pulled his visor all the tighter over his face.

"What did Casca do?" inquired the first man, with a savage air.

"He criticised," answered the last speaker, "he dared criticise our beloved Dictator, the scoundrel!" murmured he, gnashing his teeth.

"A hundred curses upon Casca's head," shouted the second bulky speaker. "I wish he were here, we would then criticise *him* in a different way."

"Won't we?" remarked the third man, with a meaning look. "If I were in Cæsar's place, I would cut off the head of every one of these rascals; what say you?" turning abruptly to the two visored friends that were standing close by.

"I would surely do that if I were in the Dictator's place," answered Cassius's companion. "It is the surest and safest way of getting rid of enemies."

"There is a brave fellow," cried the burly man, "he speaks like a good Roman, and, what is better than that, like a friend of Cæsar. It is as well for you to speak always well of Cæsar; you will find it a non-paying business if you don't."

"All Romans speak well of Cæsar," remarked again Cassius's companion, with a tremulous voice.

"But, haven't you heard what my friend has just remarked?" ejaculated the bulky man once more, "there are some Roman foxes who don't much like him; foxes are not generally fond

of lions. They say Casca is against him, and, if I hear aright, some add also Cassius to the list—plague upon both rascals! If they don't look sharp and mend their ways, by Jupiter, it shall be hot for them!"

"I shall not fail to tell them that," answered Cassius, for the first time, with a sardonic laugh.

"You know them?"

"Of course, we officers know everybody."

"In that case do it, and as soon as possible; but, take my advice, don't mix much with them; you may catch the infection."

"There is no fear of that."

"Well answered—have you heard of the rumour," remarked he, turning to his friends, "that the Dictator may in time be crowned a king?"

"Yes, and why not?" joined in the discussion another fellow. "He is more glorious, more hospitable, more generous than any king; why shouldn't he be one?"

The faces of the two friends turned deathly pale under their visors, and their hands tremblingly caught the hilts of their swords.

At this instant wild cheers, like peals of thunder, broke forth from the multitude, and all eyes turned toward one way.

"The Dictator! the Dictator!" cried several voices.

Nothing but the sudden appearance of Cæsar could have caused such enthusiastic bursts.

Presently the General, in full military uniform, appeared in the midst of the cheering crowds. He was mounted on his noble jet-black steed, with a pleasant smile on his lips, and his big eyes ran over the multitude of people and were shining with emotions which could not be doubted. He looked round and

round, and the happiness of the citizens was reflected upon his grand features. Cæsar never felt so joyous as when other people were happy: a great man, with a big heart and wide sympathy.

“Long live the Dictator!” shouted the enthusiastic men, waving their hands high in the air.

Cæsar, with a face radiant with joy and full of military dignity, saluted the crowds. Higher and higher rose the greeting and the shouting of the people: a forest of saluting hands waved in the air. A storm of enthusiasm swept over the crowds, and was not stilled until it had exhausted itself.

The two friends looked at one another in great awe. They exchanged not a single word, but in their looks there was a deep and dark meaning. Their faces twitched and became distorted with mortifying jealousy and sheer helplessness.

“To the health of our great and beloved Dictator,” shouted the voice of a tall, strong man from the multitude, raising his goblet of wine high above his head. No sooner were these words uttered than tens of thousands of cups were filled, their metallic ringing sounding like the fiery music of battle in Cæsar’s ears.

“Long live our Dictator! long live our General! long live Julius Cæsar!”

The sudden hush and silence that followed these cheers was sublime. It seemed as if mortal beings were in presence of one of their adored demi-gods.

Cæsar, looking round the multitude with his eagle eyes, felt a thrill of pleasure the like of which he had never experienced before. It was one of those rare occasions when human nature approaches nearest to the divine and God-like, when

men feel that they are doing the utmost good in their power to their fellow-creatures, rejoicing within themselves at being happy and making others rejoice.

"Be happy, my dear compatriots, be happy. Nothing gives me such a thrilling satisfaction as when seeing you joyful," and so saying, Cæsar spurred his horse and, saluting the crowds, passed along the tables. The cheers preceded and followed him in peal upon peal.

"No king can have a like reception from his subjects. What matters if the cloak of dictatorship covers the personage of a king?" said Cassius to his friend, his fox-like head shaking in an agony of jealousy.

"Both cloak and king must be rent asunder," answered his friend passionately; "Rome cannot endure such trifling any longer."

"You speak of Rome?" said Cassius. "Talk no more of that proud mistress, for there she is prostrate at the feet of the tyrant. See you not how these Romans have turned into fawning dogs and hungry pigs? By all the gods of Rome, it is a shameful sight at which a true Roman shudders."

"These monstrous processions cannot be allowed to be often repeated," replied his friend.

"I care little how often they are repeated, provided they come to an end and our scheme has a successful issue."

At this moment the cheers rose so high that the two friends were almost deafened. They were just about moving from the spot when at a near angle of the street Cæsar, who had been hidden from sight by the buildings, suddenly appeared. His horse was excited at the noise. It made a wild dash, and then halted at the spot where Cassius and his friend were standing.

"Hallo, friends!" said Cæsar, addressing the two Romans,

not knowing who they were, "Rome is feasting all around you, and you stand still here doing nothing? Go join your comrades; eat, drink, and be merry."

"We prefer to enjoy the sight," answered Cassius, still keeping his helmet on his head, and trying to change his voice lest it should betray him.

"Enjoy the feast first, the sight after, friends. Empty stomachs cannot be productive of good thoughts," said Cæsar, laughing.

"Loaded stomachs cannot aid the mind either," remarked Cassius's companion, with a slight trembling in his voice.

The Dictator for the first time looked attentively at the two men before him, and was much struck with the lean, scraggy figure of the last speaker.

"You have no flesh on you, fellow," remarked Cæsar, half in earnest half in jest; one would imagine you lived on thought instead of food."

"It is more economical, your lordship."

"Good gracious! you are only skin and bone, man! I know only one man who can be a match for you; he is one of our officials; I always advised him to eat much, but the more I gave that advice the leaner and thinner he got, and therefore I thought it wiser to stop advising him. Isn't he a match for Casca?" said Cæsar, turning and speaking to a strong stout fellow riding beside him, who was no other than Mark Antony.

Cassius's friend, who was speaking with his head still covered, gave a slight start at the Dictator's remark, but soon recovered.

"What must one do to get stout, my lord?" said he, addressing the Dictator with a bold air.

"It is very simple, my worthy friend," answered the latter, "eat much and think little ; that's all, that's all," and the General laughed.

"You are a good physician, my lord, but I am a bad patient ; I always eat little and think much."

"That is the sure way to ruin yourself, good man."

"Well, if I were to be a ruined being I would prefer to perish from much thinking than from much eating ; but who knows ?" added the speaker with an evil smile behind his visor. "There are more roads to ruin than one."

"He speaks like a wise man," said Cæsar, smiling pleasantly.

"To whom are we speaking ?" added he, turning towards Antony.

"Uncover your heads before your Dictator," sounded the voice of Mark Antony, speaking to the two Romans. The silence of Cæsar seemed to sanction and enforce this order.

At this blunt but expressed order the two Romans could no longer keep in disguise. A short silence ensued, as if the two men were in the act of meditating whether to comply. Slowly and reluctantly the visors were lifted off their faces and the helmets removed from their heads, revealing the fox-like features of Cassius and Casca !

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE CUP OF MISERY DRUNK TO THE DREGS.

THE earth whirled once more round the sun, carrying on her huge surface the misery and agony of the human race ; but what a blessing the earth does not feel the sufferings of her creatures ! Otherwise she will stop her course, and modern science tells us that this catastrophe will, in the twinkle of an eye, dash all objects on the planet's surface to pieces, causing instant death to all organic life.

The sun had long passed the meridian, and was now fast waning to the west. The mountains and hills of Spain looked glorious as their tops were tinged with the golden rays, but more glorious than all the rest was the picturesque view from a retired little town in the fastness of the mountains. The high hills and mountains before and behind it rose with their majestic heads high into the sky. Deep valleys and ravines, covered with grass and ferns, intersected their chains ; awful precipices frowned down with sublime grandeur on the deep ravines yawning far below. The birds, perched on the overhanging shrubs and trees, sent their melodious song into the sky. The trees in the neighbourhood of the town looked like so many beautiful groves, the like of which in olden times were chosen for the temples of the goddesses. A small rivulet ran down in the channel it had cut for itself below, its banks covered with willows and oleanders, while its clear, pure waters formed in some places cataracts, which

filled the quiet valley all around with sweet murmurs. High above the pretty houses of the pretty town rose a huge castle on the most prominent spot commanding all the passes round about. It had stood there for centuries, its massive thick walls defying the ravages of time.

In the verandah, overlooking the west, sat an elderly lady on a comfortable chair, her elbows resting on the arms of her seat, and her face buried in her hands. She was in a deep melancholy of thought, and remained in that attitude for a long time. With a sigh, she at last raised her head, and wistfully looked towards the setting sun. The sky above her was clear blue, but the western horizon was tinged with a faint orange colour, which deepened by degrees into bright red. The features of her face were well and finely shaped. She must have been a very beautiful woman once, but, besides her age, the cruel hand of suffering had wrought its effects upon her with indelible characters. She looked sweetly, pathetically sad, as if she had borne more misery than is common to ordinary women, and had borne it patiently and nobly. Her big eyes seemed to be slightly wet with tears, and her wistful look indicated terrible suspense, as if the fate of a man or a woman was being decided for ever, without her being able to arrive at the result. Such moments of anxiety happen but once—only once—in a lifetime.

The lady rose from her seat and began to pace the verandah. Her pace was at first slow and unsteady, but by degrees, unconsciously to her, it became quick and firm. She painfully looked towards the deepened colour of the western horizon as the tears dropped from her eyes, and a wave of pain thrilled through her. Though the setting sun was the most glorious spot, her eyes were always turned to the south-west direction.

She looked far and wide into the neighbouring hills and valleys, as if in the expectation of somebody coming from that direction ; but there was no sign of any human being.

The poor lady seemed to have learned her lesson quite well, for misfortunes are our best instructors. Her past sufferings taught her patience and resignation, and patient and calm she certainly was, even now. Without a single murmur, without a single impatient gesture, she paced on. Only now and then a low and half-suppressed sigh was heard to rise from her breast. Otherwise there was nothing to betray the intense agony of her long-suffering soul, except the glow of fire that darted from her big blue eyes, which were in sharp contrast with her white countenance.

She turned and looked towards the west, and the view of the setting sun was simply glorious. The horizon was now crimson-red, getting fainter and fainter. A few small clouds were seen now in interrupted masses, which looked like huge drops of blood, while just above the sun a thin slender cloud extended, pointed at the tip, which gave it a strange resemblance to a sharp sword of fire. Rays of light pierced the sky upward behind the dull crimson hue—the expiring light of the great orb of day.

Nature looked strange—puzzlingly strange—to the eyes of the sad lady watching from the verandah of the castle. The crimson hue reflected itself against the tops of the neighbouring mountains, giving them unusual tints. Nature all around seemed steeped in bloodlike light.

The head of the poor lady began to get dizzy ; objects seemed to be rolling before her in an inexplicable manner. Her eyes wandered vaguely about, but they always came back to rest upon these crimson spots of clouds.

“ Oh, that I could decipher these letters of blood and fire ! ” she murmured, covering her white face with her white hands.

Poor, poor soul ! would that you were never able to decipher them !

While she was thus half-swooning and distracted, a horseman, who had been crossing the valleys and low plains hidden by the adjacent hills, made his appearance on the summit of the plateau on which the castle was built.

The horseman reluctantly pushed his spurs into his horse's sides as if he was on an unpleasant message, which, nevertheless, must be delivered at any cost. The animal seemed to be very tired, but every time the spurs dashed into his sides, it seemed as if new vigour were instilled into his body and his noble blood revolted.

The rider was about forty years of age, a well-shaped muscular man ; a sword, all besmeared with blood, was hanging down his left side. He wore the uniform of a high military officer, but, like his sword, it was all stained with blood. His countenance was one plainly seen below his visor, which was lifted up as if he made no attempt at disguise. He had a comely shape, but despair, cruel despair, was depicted upon his features. He had the painful task to perform of breaking terrible news to a lady who already had enough suffering and misery. Nothing had sustained her but the hope of this day—a hope to be crushed for ever—crushed in a single moment under the weight of his news. The sun slowly sank, and the soul of the poor woman seemed to sink with that orb. The moment he disappeared, a sharp sense of misgiving took possession of her. For what reason she could not tell.

“ Our fate is settled for ever ? ” she murmured again to her-

self, and then, covering her face with her hands, she lapsed into her former attitude.

The heavy steps of a man with his long sword clinking on the pavement aroused her. She opened her eyes and, to her surprise, the horseman was before her. A strong convulsion shook her. Her instant impulse was to spring to her feet. Her hands clutched the support of her seat, but she made a supreme effort to conquer her emotion. What a discipline of suffering she must have had to obtain such a complete control over herself in such a supreme moment !

The warrior, kneeling on one knee before her, took her withered white hand, and respectfully applied it to his lips. Then, rising again, he stood mute and dumb before her. Her searching and piercing blue eyes were directed towards him like arrows of fire. She looked at him trying to read the innermost thoughts of his soul. There was no mistake about his haggard look and dejected attitude. Disaster was written on his pale forehead as plainly as could be, and the man quaked under her flashing eyes as does a lion before a blazing fire.

For a moment she looked speechlessly at him as if afraid to question him about the truth ; but these mortifying moments of a soul kept in cruel suspense were more agonising than the most painful news, and, disciplined to patience as she was, she could bear it no more.

“What news do you bring an unfortunate woman ?” she asked with trembling.

The man looked timidly at her but could find no answer. He felt as if mountains were weighing upon him, crushing his body to dust.

Her sorrowful eyes looked appealingly into his in a most

pathetic way. What could he do for you, woman of sorrow?

"Speak, good Scipio, speak," said she, the tears gathering in her eyes. "I have lived all these long, long months in misfortune and sorrow. I am prepared for the worst."

He could no longer stand her intense gaze. He cast down his eyes on the ground, and as he did so a few drops of blood streaked down on the pavement from a fresh wound under his brass helmet.

It was too much for a woman. She started as if pierced with a spear through the body, but so well was she schooled to disasters that even now she looked compassionately at him with something like sad gratitude mingled with pity. There was news plain enough in the characters of blood and the despairing features of the man before her, but such is human nature, we do not want to infer our misfortunes, we do not want them told to us in a mute silent language. We clutch so tenaciously to the last hope, as a drowning man grasps a plank of wood, and we do not believe the truth until it is spoken to us in a plain clear language.

"I have pity on you, loyal friend. Have you none on me?" asked she again, with a wild look. "Will a brave man leave a suffering woman in such cruel suspense?"

The moment his bravery was questioned, even in these gentle words, he lifted up his downcast countenance and looked reproachfully on her.

"Can a coward reveal such an awful message of disastrous tidings to a Roman princess?"

Her heart palpitated wildly within her breast. The plain truth was dawning upon her.

"All is lost!" continued the warrior, looking sadly into the woman's face. "We did all what human strength and

valour could do, but we were struggling against fate herself. Three times were the enemy defeated, three times they rallied; on the fourth assault we had so utterly routed them that we were sure victory was ours. But who can contend against destiny? The very gods in Olympus seemed to favour our adversaries and encourage them even in their defeat."

The man sighed deeply as he went on with his story, the memory of this disaster being too fresh and too appalling.

"In the heat of fighting," went on Scipio, "the two heroes of the battle came face to face. I have witnessed many a battle in my life, madam, but such desperate fighting surpassed all I have ever seen. In their struggle to reach one another the two Generals fought with the strength of lions and the ferocity of tigers. Men fell on both sides under their swords, like tottering leaves in autumn, and two piles of ghastly corpses marked the fatal spot."

The Princess started slightly at this account, and her limbs trembled, but her hands, clenched on the support of her seat, steadied her.

"Men on both sides," resumed the sad warrior, "threw themselves at certain death to save their leaders. As the heat of battle and the interest of the combatants centred in the two great figures, the battle must necessarily come to an end when either of them fell.

"I fought side by side with my dear General and friend, and I flattered myself that it might fall to my lot to be the first who could reach the enemy's leader. But I had neither the skill nor the overwhelming strength of our General, and within an astonishingly short while the sword of Sextus was menacingly glittering before Cæsar's breast, and at last the two warriors met face to face."

The lady sighed deeply and struggled to be calm.

O, Queen of courage and patience! your bravery deserves a better fate; but who can change the immutable order of destiny?

"Skilful and brave," continued the narrator, "as Cæsar was, the wild dash and furious rush of Sextus embarrassed him not a little. I could see with my own eyes his pale face twitching more with rage than anxiety. 'By Jupiter, that is too much,' cried he, as Sextus' sword was pointed towards his heart. 'My men failed in their duty, but their leader shall not fail in his,' continued he, as his eyes looked like two flames of fire. Death stared him in the face, but, nevertheless, he lost not his usual bravery.

"In that deadly combat even those who were the nearest to them stood motionless with awe and fear, while those who were in the outer circle kept on the fight with fatal determination. The swords of the two heroes clashed on each other with clear metallic ringing."

The lady turned deathly pale, her hands left their support, and were quietly crossed on her chest. Despair seemed to have endowed her with superhuman courage.

"The warriors," continued Scipio, with a sigh, "fought with the greatest valour and courage, and while Sextus was wild and overwhelming in his assault, Cæsar was cautious and calm, but, in spite of all that, the latter's condition was getting more and more critical until he seemed to be on the very verge of ruin. Just at this juncture an unfortunate accident took place which changed the issue of affairs."

The narrator stopped a moment for breath, but minutes seemed ages to the anxious mother.

"Go on, loyal friend," she muttered.

"Just at that moment," went on the officer, "when Sextus seemed to have every advantage over his adversary, a wild shouting carried on the wind came ringing in our ears. 'Cneius is captured!' was the universal cry around us, while the cry, 'Put him to the sword!' came startlingly from every direction.

"No sooner were these words heard than Sextus, maddened by the immediate danger which threatened his brother, left his enemy, and, with a furious dash, treading on both friends and foes alike, hastened to the rescue of Cneius. On this occasion he even surpassed himself. Fraternal love and affection seemed to have endowed him with a superhuman force. Followed by his devoted officers and warriors, he cut a path for himself through the enemy, and arrived on the spot, where his dear brother, and a few desperate strugglers, were closely engaged with the enemy, just in time to save his life."

The Princess, who, heretofore, seemed as if made of marble or wax, could not conquer her maternal emotion at the courage of one son and the safety of the other. Big tears streamed down her pale face, and she sobbed like a little child.

"Forgive my weakness, brave friend; I did my utmost not to be moved with your narrative, but—" and the tears sprang afresh into her eyes, "but I am a mother. Of all my emotions this is the only one which my long course of suffering could not discipline. Forgive me and continue."

The speaker looked into her face and trembled. How could he proceed? How could he give her now the truthful facts without breaking her heart? He wished he had fallen by the sword of the enemy rather than have been charged with the duty of telling an unhappy mother such terrible news.

But there was no escape from his duty ; he must proceed with his sad story to the very bitter end.

“The time these events took us,” continued Scipio, “was no more than half-an-hour, but half-hours, madam, in battles are long ages—long ages, madam—and, short as it was, that half-hour ruined us, and the battle of Munda was fought and lost ! We did all that human valour and strategy could do, but fate declared against us. I threw myself at the swords of the enemy, but the gods were so cruel that even death—even death, madam—was denied me.” And the warrior uncovered his head and chest, which were all covered with wounds. The strong emotion of the man caused his wounds to bleed afresh, and a little stream of blood issued forth and dropped on the marble of the verandah.

The unfortunate woman trembled not, wept not, moved not, but an unearthly ashy colour swept over her face, giving it a strange expression.

“What of my sons ?” faltered she out, at last, with much exertion. “What became of my sons, friend of sorrow ?”

“As Sextus could not die, he was carried by his officers against his wish, and is now out of harm’s reach.”

“And my dear Cneius ?” asked she with a strange quivering round the lips.

Scipio looked down on the marble stained with his own blood, and gave no answer.

“There is no time to lose,” gasped out the poor Princess, with a bitter smile on her face.

“Dead !” answered the man all trembling. “Would to the gods that I had had the same fate !”

The sun had long disappeared, and the silvery rays of the moon took the place of the golden glow. The silence of the

evening was solemn and impressive. The trees stood in the distance like shadowy ghosts ; the air was warm and motionless ; the mountains in the far distance frowned gloomily like huge masses of lead. The Princess looked marble-like in the pale light. A strange faint sparkle flitted for a moment in her big blue eyes ; a sweet, but sad, smile parted her lips ; her fair head inclined gently on her fair chest ; a sigh—a gentle faint sigh, like the murmur of the evening breeze—came from her chest in the hush of night. Her sorrow had crushed her. Death had come in an agony. Her soul was freed. She fell to the ground. The queen of sorrow—Cornelia Pompey, was a lifeless corpse !

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CLEOPATRA ERRS ON THE SAFE SIDE.

THE flowers were smiling sweetly in the fertile soil of Egypt. The anemonies opened their purple petals like blades of fire. The tulips appeared in the bright sunshine like buds of silver. The papyrus leaves lapped on the surface of the water, while the Nile majestically rolled on in its huge volume and its charming valley, murmuring the history of ages. Birds sang, bees hummed, and all nature smiled sweetly like a gentle maiden. Pleasant, too, were smiles on the rosy lips of Queen Cleopatra as she looked out from the window of her bedchamber. She stood meditatively—a picture of beauty and happiness. Her eyes surveyed the panorama as if wishing to confer some unlooked-for happiness on this unhappy world of ours—a goddess of beauty and goodness.

Grief, like every other human emotion, happily has its beginning and end. The Queen's tears at Cæsar's departure had long since vanished like a summer cloud. She was a bit of a philosopher. If she had the choice between a life of sorrow and a life of happiness, the latter were surely the better, and as her philosophy was of a practical kind, she at once accommodated her emotions to her judgment. Sorrow could help no one out of a difficulty, and tears, in no case, lessened the distances between parted lovers. Therefore, like a woman of wisdom and common-sense, Cleopatra flung away both sorrow and tears. But she was still more in love with the

Roman Dictator. Every fresh victory of Cæsar endeared him to her, every new promotion made her warm heart beat all the tenderer for him. Whether these achievements on the part of her lover stimulated her passion or ambition, it was difficult to say. You may tell the course of the farthest orb in heaven, but the heart of a woman has been a mystery from the beginning of the world, and it will remain so to the end of it.

This morning she was in an exceptionally good humour. Her young brother and nominal partner, young Ptolemy, had just attained the age in which, according to the Egyptian law, he could act for himself and be her sharer in throne and sceptre. The morrow was the day appointed for his coronation, and, therefore, the Queen's good humour on such an occasion, when one would expect her to be vexed, was the height of pure disinterestedness and self-abnegation.

The preparations for the coronation were already going on in the palace with much vigour and promptitude. Her Majesty, instead of eyeing them with jealousy, looked at them with perfect satisfaction. Only a smile, which the scandalizing world would call malicious, brightened her face now and then; but the world is full of scandals which should never be regarded.

The young King-elect was delighted at this happy event of his life. He could not contain his joy because the Queen, who had been hitherto callous and indifferent to him, was now all kindness and gentleness. He spent most of the day on horseback in the open air. That day looked a long, long age to him, and it was with great satisfaction that he saw the sun dip his golden crown in the waves of the Mediterranean, to rise on the morrow and see him a great king.

The evening found him alone with his loving sister. She

was love personified. In his child-like innocence he never for one moment stopped to ask himself why or how this wonderful change was brought about within such an astonishingly short period. He saw her loving and kind, and this pleased him much better than seeking for the cause of the change.

The din of preparations sounded in all parts of the palace, and the Alexandrians were overjoyed at the idea of another sharing the throne, who might do something to soften their misery and ameliorate their lot. But the harder the work went on the sweeter her Majesty smiled with satisfaction and cheerfulness. Everybody in the court was astonished at this extravagant emotion—everybody except the butler of the Queen.

The saloon was once more ablaze with lights. Its grandeur was again like bygone days. The silk and cashmere curtains hung down with graceful taste; the gold lamps were swinging with their gold chains; the lions from the ceilings looked down with their stern faces and flaming eyes; while the relics of the great Ptolemy were still fixed above the entrance-door with the royal mantle floating over spear and javelin.

Young Ptolemy sat opposite his royal sister. Between them was an ivory table, on which stood various kinds of wine and fruits, with beautiful vases filled with odorous flowers.

"This is," said the King-elect, with an innocent smile over his face, "this is the last day of your patronage over me, dear sister. You have always watched over me with such love and gentleness, that I do not feel better off with my independence than without it."

"Yes, it is the last day!" replied the Queen, with a wicked smile, not heeding her brother's compliment.

"To-morrow will see me a king."

"Quite so: a great king over a great nation."

"But crowns do not make people one whit the happier. At least this is what experience and history have taught mankind. I feel happy enough without it."

Cleopatra looked strangely into his face, paused for a moment, as if in the act of hesitation, reflected for a second—only a second—made up her resolution, and then became calm once more.

"My experience," she remarked, "differs a little from that of the world. Though crowns may be fatal to other heads on which they rest, I have been very happy with mine. My views on the subject are very simple. *Either live with a crown or not live at all.*"

"As for me, I prefer to keep my head on my shoulders, madam; I can live without a crown, but I can't live without a head."

"He is a harmless boy," murmured the Queen to herself, "but still," continued she within her, as a wicked glow brightened her eyes, "but still, it is better to err on the safe side."

"As for me," answered she, "my crown is a part of my head; they must either stand or fall together."

"May you never lose either the one or the other," said Ptolemy, rising and kissing his sister on the forehead.

For the first time something like self-reproach troubled her soul. A faint crimson colour tinged her cheeks. One might have mistaken it for the blush of a very sensitive and virtuous maiden.

Another strange look came into Cleopatra's face, another pause, another reflection for an instant, and, like a cruel

siren, she laughed boisterously as if a beautiful drama was enacted before her.

"Resume your seat, and let us be merry with wine," said the Queen.

With her own royal hands the Queen poured out some wine. Her hands shook slightly as she did so. The liquor she poured into her goblet was white, while that poured into Ptolemy's was red.

The boy-king leaned back on his seat, looked intently into the flowers, and a shade of sadness clouded his countenance. Cleopatra looked suspiciously at him.

"What ails you, brother?" asked she with her musical voice, "you are on the very eve of attaining the highest rank man could possibly dream of. You were all joy only a minute ago."

"These flowers remind me of a sad incident that occurred this afternoon as I was riding in the fields."

"You met with a sad incident to-day?"

"Well, it's a sad story."

"Tell me what it was. I am fond of all kinds of incidents, accidents, and adventures, you know; but let us have a drop of wine first."

"What! you don't like red wine?" said the King-elect, remarking for the first time the different colours of wine before them.

"My physician advised me to have white wine," replied she, eyeing him obliquely.

Ptolemy lifted his goblet until it almost touched his lips, but, his eyes falling again on the flowers before him, he laid it down on the table.

"Oh! that sight still haunts me," he said, with a shudder.

Cleopatra felt a little uneasy.

"Begin your story," she said, trying to look gentle.

"Well," began the Prince, "I was on horseback all the afternoon. The fields were beautiful; the perfume of wild, fragrant flowers filled the air, and the verdure of the scene gladdened the heart. To tell you the truth, I envied the peasants who were tilling the ground, enjoying the beauty of nature and the invigorating air.

"Dejected with the heat of the day, I made for a big tree close by. Tying my horse to it, I sat down under the shade. The wild papyrus and the shrubs on the bank of a little stream looked glorious in the sunshine; but, nevertheless, the day seemed sultry and dull. The shrubs stirred not as the sun poured down upon them his scathing heat; the water ran smoothly and noiselessly in its straight course; and now and then a breeze moved the papyrus branches, which shook their tops in a wailing and lamenting manner.

"In the midst of this silence, a groan—a deep groan—from a near distance came to my ears. It was a clear, human voice crying out, 'Woe to the man who puts his trust in a woman!' The sigh that followed the voice, deep and low as it was, rang strangely, very strangely, in my ears. It sounded like the soul of a man departing from his body."

The Queen looked distrustfully into the eyes of the speaker, but there was nothing in them save innocence.

"With much alarm and agitation," went on the Prince, "I started up to my feet, and directed my steps towards the spot where I imagined the voice came from, and lo! on the bank of the stream, among the shrubs and flowers that covered its banks, a man was lying there covered with his own blood, and a dagger near his right hand!

“That was the first time in my life I saw a wounded man, and to see him in that lonely place, a ghastly figure among the beautiful surroundings, filled my heart with terror.

“ ‘Ah, woman! woman!’ went on the unfortunate man, not being conscious of my presence. ‘Accursed be the man who builds the hope of his existence and the aspiration of his life upon a woman. Gall is his happiness, and darkness is his light.’ Another sigh, as mournful and pathetic as could be, welled out from the depth of his tortured soul, and all was silent again.

“Believing the wounded man was dead I stepped forward, and looked fully into his face. He was not dead. His eyes stared vaguely into the blue sky. An appealing look, full of silent suffering and agony, came into his face. All the grief of the man seemed to centre in his eyes, which seemed as if beholding the gods.

“My steps awakened him from his trance, and, with a wild look, he directed his bloodshot eyes towards my face. There was no mistake about his pale features and sunken eyes : he was a dying man !

“ ‘What brought you into this dire extremity, unfortunate man?’ asked I, as our eyes met.

“The man stared wildly at me. He looked round him from right to left, and from left to right, like a man coming out from a strange dream.

“ ‘Water! Water!’ cried he, in a tone of agony. ‘For heaven’s sake give me water.’ ”

“And you forgot your rank and gave him water?” asked the Queen, with a sneer.

“Great gods!” cried Ptolemy, horrified. “Can a human creature, be he king or peasant, deny the thirsty soul of

a dying man a cup of water while it runs at his feet? Heaven forbid I should be such an unnatural being! This was a lesson to me, and if I am spared to reign long I shall devote my life and energy to the happiness of our subjects."

"To those dogs of Egyptians?" asked the Queen.

"Nay, call them no dogs, dear sister. They are the gods' creatures like ourselves—so has my tutor taught me; and to the gods we are responsible for every injustice and wilful misgovernment."

"Hallo!" murmured the Queen to herself. "I have not been mistaken after all; it is always best to err on the safe side!" she repeated to her royal self.

"Well said. Go on with your story, brother, but have some wine first."

"I shall presently take some."

"Well, I fetched the cup from my pocket," continued the King-elect, "and, stooping, I filled it from the stream, and offered it to him. The poor wounded man, with a trembling hand, grasped the cup, and greedily applied it to his lips until he drained it to the very last drop. Seeing that his thirst was not quite quenched, and that he was ashamed to ask for more, I filled it again, and once more offered him the cup. He looked at me as he took it—such a look of gratitude and gentleness—I can never forget it. The intense pleasure I felt at lessening the sufferings of an unfortunate man surpassed any other pleasure I have experienced in my life!"

"I wish this stupid boy would drink his wine," murmured Cleopatra again to herself, but she deemed it wise not to press him too much.

"He smiled to me," resumed Ptolemy, "as he finished the

draught. It seemed to have revived him. Examining the cup, he looked at me with surprise.

“ ‘You seem to be a man of rank, good lord,’ said he. ‘Common people have no gold cups in their pockets. May the gods reward you a thousand times for this great act of kindness!’ and, so saying, he handed it back to me.”

The Queen, despite her impatience, began to get interested in the story.

“ ‘How came he to be wounded thus?’ ” asked she, looking askant at the untouched goblet.

“ ‘This is exactly what I inquired of him when he was a little revived. ‘How came you to be in this dire extremity?’ was my first question to him.

“ ‘Ask no sad histories, good lord,’ he answered mournfully.

“ ‘But I can’t stand thus beside you,’ I replied, ‘looking at your misery without knowing your history. You can’t be so cruel as to hide it from me.’

“ ‘You insist upon it?’ with renewed agony in his face. ‘Let it be; you have a right to ask me my sad history, and it shall not be denied you.’

“ ‘Then, with a deep sigh, the unfortunate man began his story to me in the following words:—

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE STORY OF A DEAD MAN RELATED BY A
DYING MAN.

“ I COME from the proud city of Memphis. I am the only son of a wealthy Egyptian prince. The fortune of my father fell all to me after his death, and I was the idol of my mother. My time was spent in riding and hunting.

“ One unlucky morning, as I was riding through the city, my eyes caught sight of a young lady, the daughter of the great priest of Memphis. She was as beautiful as the morning star, and her fascinating eyes worked their magic upon my inexperienced soul. In all the vast kingdom of Egypt none was to compare with her—none except, perhaps, the beautiful Queen Cleopatra, whom I never saw, as I never left my native city. Her beauty dazzled me, her rank blinded me. She was of what the world calls noble blood, which is often noble in everything except noble qualities.

“ Her charms haunted me day and night ; I saw her in my dreams ; I spent miserable days, and sleepless nights. Blind passion—the greatest of man’s enemies, the source of his misery, the wreck of his life—took possession of me. O, young Prince ! take the advice of a dying man. Never yield to your passion ; fight it with might and main ; struggle against it with all the strength of manhood. If you don’t kill your passion, it will one day kill you. If you allow it to take the lead of your life, it will surely lead it to ruin and destruction !

“This fatal love seemed to have been mutual. We smiled to each other, our smiles developed into attachment, our attachment into love, and our love ended in marriage.

“I was the happiest of men. I adored my love. I worshipped her. Her slightest wish was obeyed to the letter. I loved her with all the passion of my youth.

“She, too, seemed to be all affection and tenderness. I had been astonished to hear so much outcry in our age, as well as in past ages, against the infidelity of woman, little knowing that mine was to be a typical case of treachery. ‘You don’t know the strength of a woman’s love,’ she would often tell me in a fit of passion, or a fit of deceit. Even now I cannot tell which.

“One fine morning, as I was going to mount my horse for my usual ride—I was still fond of riding and hunting—the young servant, who held the rein of my horse, came tremblingly towards me, with a sad look in the face.

“‘My lord,’ said he, ‘my father lived and died in the service of your father. Heaven forbid that I should be less faithful and honest in yours’—and the man stopped short with pallor in the face.

“‘Well, what next?’ I asked him, with an impatient look.

“‘What next?’ replied he, with a strange smile on his face. ‘The wife of my lord is a faithless woman!’

“No sooner were these words uttered than the world grew dark in my eyes. My face was aflame with anger, and my eyes flashed.

“‘Ungrateful wretch!’ said I to the trembling figure before me, ‘darest thou tarnish the purest woman in Egypt?’ and, in a fit of rage, I lifted up my whip and gave him a sharp cut on the head.

“The poor servant uttered not a single word of discontent. Like a faithful dog which has been cruelly used by his master through ignorance, the faithful servant knelt before me, and taking the same hand which gave him the cruel and unjust cut lifted it up reverently to his lips and kissed it. A blush of shame mounted to my forehead. His appealing eyes met mine: there were tears in them.

“‘The gods forbid!’ resumed the poor servant, ‘the gods forbid that I should be faithless to my master. Even now, even now, when my blood runs down my face,’ and he wiped it off with his hand, opening it before me full of blood, ‘my life will be the forfeit if I deceive my master with a lie.’

“My faith in my wife was so strong, that even then it did not waver.

“‘Say that word another time, miserable wretch, and, by Phthah, I shall not be answerable for your head.’

“‘Even if I lose my head ten times, instead of once,’ answered the menial, ‘I must warn the master, whose bread I eat, and upon whose bounty I exist, of the shame that stains his honour.’

“His firmness puzzled me, and, despite the dreadful oath I swore, I could find no heart to illtreat him a second time. If he was no liar, ingratitude was on my side.

“‘What proof hast thou, miserable scoundrel?’ said I, as soon as my anger abated, ‘for slandering the wife of thy master?’

“‘What proof?’ answered he, with tears still bedewing his eyes, ‘what proof? No less than seeing everything with my own eyes.’

“‘Beware, man,’ said I to him, with a menacing shake of the hand, ‘if thou art found a liar, I shall have thy skin flayed

piece by piece, and every limb in your body crushed to atoms.'

" 'So let it be,' answered he, 'if there is any falsehood found in me.'

" 'Well?'

" 'Well,' answered he, 'let my master, contrary to his habit, not go out hunting to-day. Instead of returning in the afternoon, return only after an hour. I shall be then waiting for you outside the gate; I will tie the horse outside, and then—and then, leave the rest to me.'

" An instant later I was on horseback; where to go, or what to do I knew not; I left the horse to take his own way, and, with my sad head drooping over the saddle, I wandered away. Objects came across my path, but I saw them not; life was crushed out of me; I was a miserable being.

" How long I was away I could not tell. How can you tell the length of these sad, sad moments? They looked long ages to me. I might have been only half-an-hour away; it might have been more than two hours; but come back I did at last.

" My faithful servant was as good as his word. With a pale face he took charge of my horse, without a single word, without a single gesture. A minute later and he was back. With a trembling step and dejected look he led the way on.

" Before our palace there is an extensive garden, with all kinds of trees and flowers in it. At its end stood an arbour, made of green vines and shrubs growing on the spot. My wife and I often retired there during the hot summer hours of the day. An untrodden path led from its side to a neglected piece of ground. Through the latter my servant conducted me, and, as soon as we got to the by-path, the menial bent over my ear.

“‘You can see all for yourself,’ he whispered, pointing with his stiff forefinger towards the harbour as he retraced his steps, covering his face with his hands.”

“Have some wine to refresh you, darling?” said the Queen to her brother, with an impatient gesture.

The young Prince lifted the gold goblet to his lips, and, being too much excited with his narrative, he only sipped a few drops, and laid it down on the ivory table, and then continued:

“You have no idea of the agony of a man prying into his own shame. Woe is me that I lived to feel the mortification of those terrible moments, but, agonising as the task was, it must be done; honour, which was dearer to me than life, demanded it.

“Gently and noiselessly I trod the path, then, stretching myself on the ground, I looked through a little opening between the leafy wall of the harbour, and lo! there sat the daughter of the high priest in her wonted place, mine was occupied by a man, a son of another priest, whom I always looked upon as an intimate friend—an intimate friend, young nobleman, Lachora—for this was the name of the high priest’s daughter—I call her no more my wife—Lachora was sitting with a winning smile on her face, hand in hand with Neebo, the priest’s son.

“‘How can you manage it?’ asked Neebo.

“‘Nothing simpler,’ answered my faithful Lachora. ‘A few drops of this poison settles the question in a very easy and simple manner,’ and she brought out from her pocket a red coloured little phial, and held it out in her delicate hands.”

Cleopatra turned deadly pale. She opened her black eyes and looked at the young King-elect with such a frightened air, that poor Ptolemy was alarmed, though she looked steadily into his face, while every limb in her body trembled.

"Good gods!" murmured she to herself, "does he suspect anything?" and, with an affrighted look in her usually calm face, she began to breathe with difficulty.

"What ails you, my beautiful sister? You look unwell."

"It is this fiend of a woman," answered she, with an innocent, angelic expression. "How can a woman be such an infernal fiend?"

"A few women, only a very few, have the tenderness of your heart, dear sister," replied the royal simpleton, and once more he rose from his seat and kissed her on the forehead.

"Have a draught of wine, brother?" repeated the Queen, with a gentle look.

The Prince lifted the goblet, touched it once more with his lips, putting it back on the table.

"I shall drink it presently," answered Ptolemy, "but I must go on with my story."

She looked again at him. This woman, who was so clever in reading the hearts of men, was puzzled what to make out of the case of this simpleton. "If he would only drink his wine," thought she to herself.

"Well, go on," said the Queen at last, and Ptolemy began afresh.

"Neebo looked at the phial with much satisfaction. 'Take care you don't arouse his suspicions,' said he, with a shake of the head.

"'Be at ease,' answered Lachora.

"'When will you begin the transaction?'

"'To-night, as we sit for dinner, I will mix the poison with his wine, and he will do the rest,' said her ladyship, with a wicked laugh."

Again the face of the Queen grew pale, and again a frown

darkened her brow. Her breath once more became irregular and troubled. "How he plays with my feelings!" said she to herself; but the Prince, unaware of all her agitation, continued.

"My blood was chilled within me, and the cold perspiration gathered on my forehead and dropped down my face like an icy stream. There, in the very arbour where she swore she would remain faithful to me unto death, there she was planning my destruction in cold blood.

"Then, a few moments after—then—oh, my gods! I would rather die a thousand times than to have experienced the tortures of those moments. The rest of my shame must remain untold.

"It was more than enough. Quietly I rose up from my concealment, and, regaining the neglected piece of ground, I joined my servant, who, white as a wall, was holding the rein of my horse with his eyes upon the ground.

"‘Forgive my harshness,’ said I, extending my hand to him.

"‘Would to the gods I had lost my head,’ he said, as he knelt before me, ‘than have seen that sight!’ and, applying his lips to my hand, he covered it with kisses, hot tears streaming down upon it as he did so.”

"Have another drop from your goblet, darling; if not for your sake at least for mine," said her gracious Majesty.

"For your sake I would do anything," replied the King-elect, and taking the gold goblet he swallowed almost half its contents in one draught.

A sigh of relief—a sigh of one in mortal suspense coming back to life—came from the Queen; her face beamed with delight; her eyes brightened with the infernal light of triumph.

"Go on with your story, dearest ; I can listen to it much better now."

The poor royal boy, with an 'innocent smile on his face, began once more.

"I did not return that day to the house until evening time, when, going up to my armoury, I picked up my best sword, and, wrapping my mantle round me, I directed my steps towards the house of my *friend* ; to my *friend's* house, noble young man !

"He had just finished his meal, and was stretched on an easy velvet sofa, with his back propped with soft cushions. The moment he saw me he started up to his feet with a look of surprise and astonishment on his face. However, he soon controlled his emotion, and, stepping towards me, he gave me a cordial shake by the hand, like the most loving of my friends.

" 'Have you had supper ? ' he inquired, with a trembling voice.

" 'No, not yet.' My answer reassured him.

" 'I won't press you to take it here, for I am sure your loving Lachora is waiting for you, and it will be unkind to deprive you of one another's company.'"

" 'It is exceedingly kind and considerate of you.'"

" 'You are a happy man, perhaps the happiest of men. High birth, youth, wealth, and the most beautiful of fascinating women in all Egypt—what can the heart of a man desire more ? '"

" 'Nothing,' answered I coldly ; and as I surveyed the room my eyes rested on a beautifully-studded sword hanging on the wall.

" 'Tell me, arn't you very happy ? '"

“ ‘ Very happy, very happy, indeed, good sir.’

“ ‘ Philosophers say,’ continued my sincere friend, philosophising, ‘ that no man can ever attain perfect happiness in this world ; but you are a living disproof of the arguments of these stupid theorists.’

“ ‘ Quite so, quite so.’

“ ‘ Some believe the true happiness of a man to lie in a future world. I prefer to have mine here, and I won’t be the loser if there is another one hereafter.’

“ ‘ Very wise, very wise,’ I repeated, with my eyes still resting on the weapon.

“ ‘ If there is a future life,’ went on my *friend* with his philosophy, ‘ you lose nothing by enjoying pleasures on this side of the unknown world ; while if you lose them here, and the theories of our wise men turn out to be groundless, you lose everything.’

“ ‘ Right,” I answered, with cold indifference.

“ ‘ Try to lose nothing in this world, my dear friend.’

“ ‘ I have lost my honour !’ I thundered, indignant at his effrontery. ‘ I have lost my honour, and I come now to demand it from you, traitor and coward !’

“ A thunderbolt crashing at his feet could not have produced a more stunning effect. The colour faded away from his cheeks ; his eyes stared at me in a strange manner ; his jaws opened, and for a moment he looked like one paralysed.”

When Ptolemy had got thus far he applied his hands to his temples and pressed tightly on them.

“ I am beginning to feel a severe headache,” he said, with a painful look in the face.

“ That’s nothing, my treasure,” answered her Majesty with a graceful air. She would have pressed him for more wine,

but as she grew more interested in the story, now that her mind was easy she desisted from it, lest he may not have time to finish.

The King-elect, with an effort, composed himself and began again. His face was a little pale, but of that he was unaware.

“He tried to put on a feigned surprised look ; but his first emotion of terror was real, and nothing but truth could have produced it.

“ ‘ What mean you, dear Seb ? Surely you are joking ? ’ asked he, with a faint smile.

“ ‘ I joke very seldom, treacherous brute ; I come to demand my honour from you ; you have to pay for it, and that with your blood ! ’

“ ‘ You are talking Roman to me ; I understand you not.’

“ ‘ I am speaking to you in the plain Egyptian language. If you are still dull I have a friend much truer than you, false Neebo, who aids my Roman language,’ and at the same instant I drew my sword from its scabbard.

“ ‘ What proof have you to support this charge ? ’

“ ‘ My proof is that my fatal dinner awaits me at home, where my *faithful* wife is impatiently waiting with her red phial ! ’

“ A groan came out from the miserable wretch as if he had been pierced.

“ ‘ How came you in possession of this secret ? ’ he asked, as he gasped out for breath.

“ ‘ Ask no more questions, impudent dog. I would have run my sword through your ugly figure, and nailed you to the wall ; but it is a cowardly thing to do. Yonder your sword is hanging ; defend yourself as best you can.’

“I stood aside for him to reach his sword, and, to prevent surprise, I went to the door and fastened it.

“Without a single word, the man walked towards the weapon, and, seeing death staring him in the face, he drew it resolutely.

“‘Woman was the curse of the world since creation,’ muttered he to himself, ‘but better perish in that cause than in another.’

“The room was a comparatively big one, allowing space for action. The chairs and tables were moved to a corner, and with our drawn swords we stood face to face.

“He was not a bad swordsman after all. He gave me two wounds before he received a single one himself; but life was not worth a straw to me, and I almost courted death at the point of his sword. My despair made me wild and reckless. As his weapon touched me for the third time I madly rushed at him, and, with one thrust, ran my sword through his bowels. He gave one shriek and fell heavily to the ground, his blood jetting out in a dark stream, and his features working in convulsions as he lay struggling on the ground. Frantic with rage and fury I unlocked the door, and, locking it again from the outside, I rushed out towards my house.

“Carefully wrapped with my mantle, I ascended the steps, and entered my armoury. My sword, still smoking with the blood of my enemy, was replaced just as it was. My wounds gave me little trouble; but my frenzied emotions were such that I could have disregarded the most smarting pain.

“Dressing my wounds and changing my clothes, I repaired to the saloon, which was ablaze with lights. On a soft sofa, reclining on her beautiful white arms, sat the daughter of the great priest, happy and smiling.

"The moment I entered the saloon she started up to her feet, and, running towards me, she entwined her arms round my neck, and passionately kissed my lips. Her's felt like two flames of fire burning into my soul. Never was a kiss so treacherous as that fiery one!

"I played the part of an ignoramus. Calm and serene to a marvel, I sat beside her on the soft sofa. Apart from the slight paleness on my face, which reflected itself to my eyes in a silver mirror opposite, there was nothing unusual about me. Her keen, piercing eyes seemed to search into the very depth of my heart; but they could read nothing.

"'Good gracious!' began her ladyship, encircling my waist with her right arm, 'and what have you done with yourself all day, you cruel man?'

"'Riding and hunting,' answered I, trying to smile pleasantly.

"'And you desert your poor loving wife to follow your amusements? But such is the nature of men; all men are cruel and heartless—they are all alike.'

"'Did you feel lonesome, dear?'

"'Lonesome? I should think so. Your absence frightened me to death.'

"'Poor, poor darling,' said I, patting her on the shoulder, 'forgive my want of consideration.'

"'You must atone for it to-night, or else I shall never forgive you.'

"'I am ready to atone for it even with my life.'

"She looked strangely into my face, then her eyes brightened with a strange smile at what she thought an accidental witticism on my part.

"'Dinner first, pleasure after,' she said laconically.

“ ‘I can taste no food to-night,’ I said somewhat coldly.

“ ‘What ! No dinner, and you have been out all day ?’

“ ‘I had a late lunch in the open air ; I feel quite satisfied. But this is no reason why you shouldn’t have your own.’

“ ‘Bless my life !’ cried her ladyship somewhat disconcerted, ‘to spend all day in tears, and then find myself alone at table. Oh, the sufferings we endure, poor women ! We are your playthings, gentlemen, only playthings !’ emphasized my love, with a sorrowful shake of the head ; ‘but my sufferings are not in vain if I could only make you happy,’ ended she with a virtuous air about her. ‘But you will taste a drop of wine with me, darling, won’t you ?’

“I looked steadily into that infernally beautiful face to see whether, at least, there was a self-feeling guilt on it. No, there was none ! Not a muscle moved, not a limb trembled. Calmly she smiled in my pale face, and another passionate kiss was impressed on my lips, which felt like the flame of hell.

“ ‘I can take no wine either, Lachora,’ answered I, looking her straight in the face.

“No sooner my love heard these words than she burst into a fit of tears, which streamed down her ruddy face. Women have an astonishing command over their tears, good sir ! They have simply to will it, and tears will gush out from their charming eyes like showers of rain in spring time.

“ ‘Woe unto me, unfortunate woman that I am !’ she broke forth with a wailing, mournful sound. ‘I have lost a treasure of love, your wealth of affection, your devoted attachment—what am I to live for ? I have hitherto lived to you, and for you, and now I feel that I am a burden on you, and my only

prayer to the gods is to shorten a life full of misery and suffering,' and another shower watered her roses.

"So beautiful, so fascinating she looked that evening, her face like a blooming rosebud, her eyes bedewed with tears, that for a moment I staggered and doubted my eyes. Even my own eyes I doubted, good nobleman; and, for a moment, a lingering passion towards her charms bewildered me. But it was only for an instant, then all vanished, and nothing remained but the cruel crime she was so eager to commit.

"Filled with horror and disgust, I turned away with a loathsome, mortified feeling. I would have willingly given my life if it could only undo the faithlessness of that woman.

"‘And you will leave me thus dejected?’ began my beauty with another shower of tears. ‘Have you no kind word, no comfort to give your poor loving wife?’

"‘Will nothing short of my keeping you company to wine make you happy?’ and I looked hard into her face.

"Still she was relentless; the hard, resolute features were the same; the disguised threat in her eyes was the same. It was impossible to dissuade her from her purpose. When a woman resolutely makes up her mind to do anything, it is like the decree of fate: nothing can change it.

"‘It is not the wine that I care for,’ she remarked, ‘but the happiness it implies; I shall always feel wretched until I can make you happy.’

"‘As you please,’ ejaculated I at last.

"A bright smile, wicked, but still charming, lit her powerful eyes. Her sadness vanished in a moment, and she was again the picture of happiness, little knowing that the fool before her was in possession of her secret."

The young Prince now applied both hands against the

temples of his head, and pressed upon them with all his strength.

"Oh, my head!" he cried. "I feel hammers beating inside my brain; it's terrible!"

"Nonsense!" replied her Majesty. "It will pass off, dear. I am now getting more and more interested with the story of your friend; continue it."

Ptolemy, with his eyes dilated, and his breath labouring, went on with the story of his friend.

"She flew to the flask, and the daughter of the high priest, with her own hands, served the wine on an inlaid table, on which there was also delicious cake and fruits.

" 'I can live now!' cried she, with her face beaming with joy.

" 'And I,' replied I, with desperate determination; 'and I, do you think I can *die* now?'

" 'May you long live to make me happy!' answered Lachora, suppressing an indiscreet laugh.

" 'People sometimes die, Lachora, when they least expect it.'

" 'Speak no more of death at this time of joy. If we are to die let it be amidst pleasures.'

"There are certain rare cases when excessive despair, instead of making people dejected and despondent, tend to make them happy with their misery, so to speak; and such was the case with me. I could not have been in a more wretched condition; and when the worse comes to the worst you have nothing more to fear.

" 'Straight to your harp,' said my love to me, 'and let us to songs of bygone days.'

"No sooner were these words uttered than I was out of the

saloon, but, instead of going direct to my bedroom, where the instrument was, I stopped midway in the dark gallery.

“In the bright saloon the rosy face of Lachora was seen to brighten up with a triumphant look. Stepping quickly towards the table, without the least emotion on her part, she poured the wine into both goblets, and then—and then, taking out from her pocket the fatal red phial, gazed at it with infernal joy. The poison glittered in the light like a beautiful crystal; so did the face of that unspeakable woman: two beautiful colours—beautiful to look at, but deadly to meet.

“With her own delicate white hand, the same one which encircled my waist when I entered the saloon, she poured the poison into the goblet intended for me. Then, falling into a nervous fit of laughter, she took hold of her harp that was lying in one of the corners, and sat in her seat, playing a most exquisite tune. And could you guess what tune it was, good sir? Oh, great gods! it was the same one she played the first evening of our marriage!

“If there was any hesitation on my part regarding the course I should take, that tune obliterated it. I hastened to my room, the notes of that fatal music always sounding in my ears. In a minute I was back. She was still playing: this indicated that no change in the arrangement of the goblets had taken place.

“‘You recognise this music, darling, don’t you?’ she asked, with an innocent look. ‘Can I forget the happiest evening in my life?’ said I. ‘It makes me feel as if we were newly married.’

“A half suppressed laugh relaxed her face as she was tightening the strings of her harp.

“Our music sounded, in the stillness of the night, like celestial melody. The notes falling on the odorous air, seemed

to stir it into life. All looked gay and bright, all—all, generous nobleman, except my poor broken heart, which seemed to me as black as the moonless night without. The music sounded in my ears like a knell of death, and a knell of death it was !

“ At last the fatal moment came. How long we struck our strings I could never recollect ; but silence succeeded music, and we looked at each other. Each one of us being certain it was to be the last gaze on a living face.

“ ‘ Now to wine, darling.’

“ ‘ As you please, Lachora,’ answered I, with a sigh.

“ I looked into the liquor ; it was red wine. Be careful of red wines, young man ; they are very dangerous to touch.”

The poor young Prince, when getting to this part of the story, felt quite exhausted. A numbness began to creep into his system. He looked into his goblet, and the wine in it was red, too. His headache had, for the moment, ceased ; but a strange grey pallor was manifest in his features. A sense of general lassitude and exhaustion was creeping over him. Even then he tried to brave what he thought was a slight indisposition, and a faint smile played on his face.

“ What makes you smile, darling ? ” asked Cleopatra.

“ It is the childish horror of this unfortunate man of red wine. For mine is red,” he observed, pointing to the goblet ; “ but I have no fear of it ; it is the poison in the wine, and not the colour of it, that kills.”

Cleopatra, in spite of the effort she made to control herself, burst into a fit of laughter.

“ That’s it, brother, that’s it ; but hurry on with your story, we haven’t much time to spare.”

The Royal Simpleton went on.

“ We lifted our goblets above the table, and, bringing them

in touch with one another, their metallic ringing gave a strange vibration in the silent saloon. I lifted mine to my lips. I tasted the fatal wine; then put it down on the table.

"She watched me, and drank not a drop of hers, but, in terror, she laid it down too.

" 'It is scarcely tasted !' remarked her ladyship, with utter disappointment.

" 'Will you always insist upon my drinking wine ?' "

" 'I shall never feel happy until that cup makes *you* happy,' answered Lachora, with her index-finger towards my goblet.

" 'Well,' said I to myself, 'if my goblet gives more happiness to people than any other one why should I be so selfish, and keep it to myself?' and, like a loyal unselfish husband, I meant that my beloved wife should have this happiness-giving draught all to herself.

" 'I will do anything to secure your happiness, even if my death was in this goblet.'

"She looked wildly at me; it was the first, but not the last, manifestation of surprise she experienced that fatal evening.

" 'Have you no other kinds of fruit, Lachora ?' "

" 'Plenty; you have only to ask, and you shall have more different kinds of fruit and cakes.'

"Quick as an arrow she left the saloon, her supple figure flitting like a shadow, while her silk robe ruffled as she darted out, leaving behind it a perfumed atmosphere.

"In a moment she was back with a big dish full of various fruits, and another of different cakes. But that minute was quite enough to change the game that was going on before us; nothing of importance to speak of: only her goblet became mine, and mine hers!

"Putting the dishes on the table she again pledged me.

Once more our gold goblets met, and gave their clear metallic, but fatal, ringing—then all was over, the goblets were emptied to the dregs!

“A look of triumph glittered in her eyes, and with an air of relief and ease, like one who has accomplished a very difficult task, she sighed. If she could only have had the sense of using white wine to herself, and red wine to me, she would at once have been undeceived, but my simplicity blinded her.”

Another smile dawned on the face of the King-elect. “There,” said he to the Queen, “you have white wine, but what difference does it make to you? It is the poison in the wine, I repeat, that makes all the difference.”

“Oh, the darling!” answered her Majesty, with a sneer. But scarcely had she finished her affectionate remark, when the stupid Prince again brought his hands to his head with an agony of pain.

“It is this accursed headache,” cried he, “but no matter, it will soon pass off.”

“Surely it shall, brother. Have some more wine, it will do you good.”

Ptolemy lifted the goblet to his lips. O, poor innocent royal ass! drop down your goblet. Can you not make use of the story you are relating yourself? But such was the irony of fate. With a trembling hand he poured the rest of the wine down his throat.

Cleopatra laughed so hysterically that she had to hold her sides. She saw a beautiful drama enacted before her, which was soon to end in tragedy.

“Go on, dear brother, with your story,” rejoined the Queen, after a pause, “go on, and be quick about it, for, I assure you, there is not a single moment to lose.”

Neither was there any single instant to spare, poor simpleton. Finish your story as well you may.

Ptolemy sighed, and continued :

“All was silent again, and once more did we look one another in the face. Our eyes met in the pale flickering lights. In that deadly game whose stake was life, both of us had the look of certain victory. Death—death—alone with its horrible and ghastly visitation was to decide the fate of battle.

“‘How did you spend your time in my absence, Lachora?’

“‘In tears, darling.’

“‘Were they all shed in that arbour, yonder?’

“A look of unspeakable surprise contracted her features.

“‘What arbour?’ asked she in terror.

“‘Our summer arbour, where you swore you would be faithful to me unto death.’

“‘Yes, I retired to it in the heat of the day to dissipate the clouds of my grief.’

“‘Poor, loving wife!’

“‘If you could only know how much I suffered; it was the bitterest day of my life.’

“‘And could Neebo do nothing to alleviate your suffering?’ I asked with a sardonic smile.

“‘What do you mean, Seb?’

“‘I mean that arbours sometimes speak out their long hidden secrets. I mean that you are a faithless woman!’

“‘Seb, Seb, be careful how you talk to the daughter of the high priest. What ground have you for throwing this infamous charge in my teeth?’

“‘These, madam!’ and I brought my two forefingers into my eyes.

"At this alarming revelation her features contracted in a most convulsive manner. A tigress wounded by the hunter could not have looked more ferocious. The shame of the faithless wife gave way now to the vehemence of the faithless woman.

"'I wished to spare you this pain in these your last moments. I love Neebo, I love him; learn and be mortified,' said she, pulling herself up to her full height.

"'Neebo is dead, madam.'

"'Dead? dead? It is false, liar that thou art! Him I shall espouse, and with him happy I shall be.'

"'I have slain him this very evening with my own sword. He was a great philosopher on happiness, madam, but not all the philosophy of the world could save him from his deserved fate.'

"'Traitor and assassin!' shrieked out my beautiful love, still standing and lifting up her hand in a menacing attitude, 'traitor and assassin, you shall pay with your life the penalty of your crime, die in your place, for it is deadly poison you have taken.'

"'So shall it be to you, madam.'

"'Coward, base coward! dare you lift up your blood-stained hand against a woman, and that the daughter of the highest priest in Memphis?'

"'You shall die with your own criminal hand, Lachora.'

"'Conceited wretch! think you that your death will drive me mad to commit suicide? Never! I mean to live a good long while yet, disgusting man. If Neebo is really dead as you say, there are plenty of young men who will throw themselves at my feet to adore my beauty; learn and be mortified.'

“‘There are yet gods in heaven,’ said I, pointing towards the starry night, ‘they will surely punish your faithlessness and crimes.’

“‘Wait till the gods administer justice,’ she replied, with a defiant look.

“‘Kneel down upon your knees, sinful woman, and if you know any prayer say it, for your minutes are numbered.’

“‘What meanest thou, wretch?’

“‘I mean that as your lips touched your goblet it made it sweet to me; your absence from the saloon, short as it was, changed our game. In that brief space your goblet became mine, and mine yours!’

“She tried to speak but could not. Suddenly her face turned livid, her lips, pale and trembling, quivered in a strange manner, her face twitched as if in a fit of convulsions, and all her limbs shook as if by the unseen hands of the gods. A shriek—a single shrill shriek—pierced the silence of the night; and the woman who was but a minute ago full of life and beauty, fell down at my feet a heap of lifeless matter!

“What was life to me after my happiness was thus wrecked? Neither riding, nor hunting, nor wealth, nor rank could give me what I lost. Oh, if I could only regain happiness, and be the poorest and humblest man in Egypt! But such is the decree of the gods. All men whether rich or poor, high or low, mighty or weak, must all be unhappy alike, and woe to the human race if there is no brighter and happier future for it!

“My misery followed me everywhere—in the field, in the house, in my bed, and even in my dreams. I was a haunted

man, and like one forsaken by the gods, and deserted by man, I was miserable and wretched.

"The joyful news of the accession of the Queen's brother to the throne attracted me to this city. All are in anxious expectation of this great occasion, for Egypt is suffering under her present tyrants of officials from north to south, and from east to west. All Egypt is looking forward to this happy and grand occasion. May the gods help the new King, and guide him in the paths of virtue and justice.

"But my misery and sufferings followed me even to Alexandria. I find no peace anywhere. In black despair I tried to end a wretched existence. But even Death seemed to shun me, and to my mortification I find that I am yet a living man. Oh, coward that I am!

"Accursed be woman, dark be her life, may her happiness turn into suffering, and her joy into bitterness, for all the flood of crimes and misery she causes upon the face of the earth. And now, young nobleman, farewell."

As Ptolemy finished the story of the poor wounded man, he gazed upon his sister with a vague and meaningless look. His face was deathly pale, for death was hovering over him like a spectre, but, nevertheless, he made a supreme effort to describe the last moments of the wounded man.

"As the man finished these words," continued the Prince, "quick as lightning he grasped the dagger, still smoking with his own blood, and before I realised what he was about, he lifted it high up into the air, and then plunged it right into his heart, and with a pitiful moan, his life had fled."

"You have a marvellous memory, stupid boy!" remarked Cleopatra, watching the rapid effects of the poison she had administered to him. "You have a good memory, but a bad

mind. When you meet Lachora, tell her there is a royal woman in Egypt who *knows* how to handle poisons royally."

Without a word, without a question, without a gesture, Ptolemy, terrified and panting for breath, looked at the infernal Queen. His eyes glazed, his muscles contracted, his lips trembled as if in the act of speaking out something ; but Death had clutched him.

"It is always better to err on the safe side," repeated her Majesty, as she rose from her seat and walked elegantly towards the door, while the lifeless corpse of Ptolemy, with the glazed eyes fixed towards her, lay on the floor.

"These stupid fools," murmured the Queen to herself, as she walked out from the saloon, leaving behind her a perfumed atmosphere. "These stupid fools sometimes repeat lessons which should have been far better *learnt* than *told* !"

CHAPTER XXXV.

LOVE STRONGER THAN SLAVERY.

THE moon was high up in the sky, her faint pale light struggling through the thick heavy clouds. No noises disturbed the stillness of night. The streets of Rome were quite deserted ; all its citizens had retired to rest.

In the midst of this silence a horseman was crossing the solitary road, his mantle thrown round his body, its folds carefully brought over the face so as to hide it from view. He looked round, in a cautious manner, to see whether he was watched by anybody ; but, his eyes falling on no human creature, he reclined his head, and trotted along with his horse. Clearing the streets, he now turned to the right, making towards a lonely spot, on which stood a single little palace, and then dashed on at a gallop. Reaching the gate, he dismounted, and, leaving his horse in charge of the porter, he directed his steps towards the building. Still covering his face with his mantle, he mounted the steps, his spurs clinking in the silence. Entering the palace, he was received by a black slave, who, in spite of his covered face, respectfully saluted him, and conducted him to the reception saloon. The furniture, compared with the building, was rather poor, but, nevertheless, fairly comfortable. A Roman lamp lit the spacious room with a flickering light.

Seating himself on a comfortable sofa, the horseman dropped the mantle which had hidden his features. He was

a well-built man, with square shoulders and a strong frame. His looks conveyed the impression that he worked his muscles more than his brain. There was no worry on his face, there was no depth in his reflection ; ambition was not there, but if the goddess of fortune set him on her wheel he could make good use of it. There was no originality in him, no wide conceptions. He felt that he had no great problems to solve, yet if thrown into the whirlwind of politics he could move with the storm as well as any other political component.

He examined the saloon where he was sitting up and down, right and left, but in a haphazard and abstracted way. He was in the room, but his thoughts were somewhere else. Some trouble was stamped on his brown, ruddy face. He never felt so anxious except there was a woman in the affair, and a woman there was.

He had been only a few minutes in the saloon when a young lady swept in, with a jingling sound in her feet. Her face was a little pale and careworn. In her large bright eyes there was a languid look ; nevertheless, she was of more than ordinary beauty. Her majestic figure and proud looks contrasted greatly with the gold chains on her feet, and as the metallic ringing sounded in the saloon a blush mounted to her proud face, now prouder even in slavery.

The moment the young woman made her appearance the visitor rose from his seat and saluted her with respect, but not without embarrassment. The lady returned his salutation with a dignified air, and, motioning him to resume his seat, she sat in an arm-chair opposite him.

There was silence for a few moments, during which a blush, deepening into crimson colour, tinged her face.

“ Well, sir ? ” said the young woman, at last breaking the

silence. "You urgently begged for an interview with me, which I now accord."

The signs of embarrassment on the face of the visitor grew deeper. An air of perplexity now manifested itself, as if he were wanting to say something, but lacked the courage.

"Very few people," continued the young woman, "care to have interviews with persons in chains. Your request puzzles me, I must confess."

"Noble Princess!" began the visitor, "it is concerning these chains that I am come now. I am here to-night to offer you liberty."

"Indeed! But I have been now so long accustomed to them that it is doubtful whether I can do without them."

"Not only am I come to offer you liberty, but such an ambitious rank as would make the greatest ladies in Rome jealous of the once prisoner Princess."

"You overwhelm me with cheerful news, noble lord."

"Not at all. It's a mistake that should have been rectified long ago, and I now come to rectify it."

"And so, Julius Cæsar has felt the wrong he had done to a defenceless Princess, and he is trying to redress it now. You come in his name, noble lord?"

"I come in my own name."

"I thought there was one man in Rome—only one—who could speak in the language you use, and with the assurance you have given me."

"Well, where Mark Antony says yes, Cæsar dare not say no."

"So you are a second Cæsar!"

"To a certain extent."

"And in this capacity you offer me liberty?"

"I do."

"You are a generous-hearted gentleman, noble Antony, and may the gods reward you for your kindness!"

A fresh crimson blush covered the face of the Roman as he tried to answer her.

"Beautiful Princess," he said, after some confusion and hesitation, "I must confess that my services are not disinterested. Men do not render ladies such high services without the expectation of a reward."

No sooner were these words uttered than the Princess regained all her royal dignity and proud attitude.

"A reward, sir?" asked she, with surprise. "I have not yet accepted your offer. But what mean you?"

"I mean that it is a commercial business, and that your freedom will be bargained and bought."

"My wealth is gone. I live on the bounty of Rome."

"Bother take me!" murmured Antony, half to himself, half to the Princess. "I can handle a sword well enough, but when it comes to words I feel awkward. I have always been a bad speaker. Mark Antony spurns all the gold of the world if this would only win him the hand of Princess Arsino."

The latter, pulling herself up to her full height, directed at him a look of grave reproach.

"This," said she, with a proud tone, lifting up her white hand, "this has been already bestowed upon a Roman, who, if not nobler, is at least equal to Antony. Apart from this consideration, I scorn to purchase my liberty at the expense of my honour."

"Your honour? the gods forbid!" replied Antony, with emotion. "Your honour remains as spotless as that of the most virtuous lady in Rome. You shall be wedded to me as wife."

“Speak not in vain; you will only lose words and time.”

“Princess Arsino, I inform you that Sextus Pompey was finally conquered in the plains of Munda. His brother was slain by our soldiers, and he himself wandering with no place that can afford him asylum.”

“I am acquainted with the fact.”

“You *know* this, and you still adhere to the man whose cause has been irrevocably lost?”

“I *do*,” answered the Princess, with a clear firm voice.

“This is bad politics, noble Princess.”

“We poor women are not well versed in politics; that we leave to you clever men. I have one law in this, as in every other thing, and that is to be honest and faithful, whether it is good or bad politics.”

Antony gazed at the young Princess, and could not but admire her sterling character and faithfulness, which were rare qualities among the soft sex of the ancients. Having failed to stimulate her ambition, he now, as an experienced man, tried to use that most powerful weapon in severing lovers—jealousy.

“But how can you make such a sacrifice to a man who has been faithless to you?” he asked, with a sneer. “All the world talks of his love for Cleopatra.”

Antony was not much mistaken after all. Arsino, who had hitherto spoken to him with astonishing calmness and indifference, changed in the twinkle of an eye into the vehement and wronged woman. Her cheeks flushed, and her eyes brightened; she looked a hundred times more beautiful, and Antony felt his heart melting within him.

“It is false!” she cried, with all the dignity of her injured womanly pride, “it is false! Do you think I would suffer so much for the sake of a faithless man? Never! My sister has

so many lovers on her list, that it matters little if one man be added or subtracted from it. She tried with might and main to win him after Cæsar's departure from our shore. She even offered him her aid to retrieve the losses of his house. What matters it to Cleopatra whether her lover was Cæsar or Sextus, or anybody else, provided she could amuse herself for a short while. If I had condescended to be brought to Cæsar in a bundle of clothes, as she did, the prisoner Arsino, instead of dragging her chains of shame, would have been now on the throne of Egypt, with a crown on her head, and a sceptre in her hand. But I could never stoop to such degradation, no, not even to be the queen of the whole world. What! buy rank and position at the expense of honour? Never! no, not even crowns and sceptres can give you back your honour when once it is lost; nothing can restore its glory if it be tarnished. I prefer slavery to shame; I prefer misfortune to vice; I prefer suffering to dishonour. Happy I feel, even now, as I drag these ornaments of slavery." With a deep blush on her face she pointed towards the gold chains that jingled on her feet. "Why? Because I am at peace with the gods, my honour, and my conscience. Misfortunes make my love a hundred times dearer to me. What? desert Sextus because he is unfortunate? To desert him thus would be to snap the last thread of hope upon which hangs his existence. Nothing sustains him in his misery except the confidence that this heart still beats for him. Nothing sustained me in mine except his faithfulness to me, and shame upon a woman who deserts a man for no other reason than because he is unfortunate. No! Sextus and Arsino must either rise or fall together. Nothing but *death* can sever our affection!" The Princess drew from her heart a jewelled locket, hanging from a gold chain, and applied it to her

lips. "Here is a lock of his hair," she said, as her face flushed, "and it is worth to me all the crowns and wealth of the world."

Antony spoke no more. He was a man addicted to pleasure, but, nevertheless, was, at this period of his life, honest and noble-hearted. It was the first time he had had a rebuff in love; the first incident in his personal, but wide, experience in which he had met a virtuous and pure woman.

"Oh!" murmured he to himself, "if all women were like her, how much misery could have been avoided, and how much happiness could have been conferred on our unfortunate race!"

"Forgive my rashness, noble Princess?" he stammered out. "You are a rare jewel. You change misery into perfect happiness. I would willingly change places with Sextus if I could only receive such a precious treasure as your love, and such a brilliant jewel as your character. In reverence I bow to your purity, and in veneration I kneel before your faithfulness." Then, respectfully drawing near to the Princess, he knelt before her and kissed the hem of her robe. Before Arsino could fully realise what had happened he had risen and was gone.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DIVINE ELECT.

THE battle of Munda gave the last fatal blow to the Pompeian faction. Both parties fought with that resolution and determination which despair alone can inspire, and it required all the courage and military tactics of Cæsar to effect a victory. His own life and the safety of his army were in imminent danger. For a few moments he was standing on the verge of destruction. Nothing but his skill and determination saved him. "In other battles," said he to his intimate friends, "I fought for glory, but at Munda I fought for life."

His triumphant entry into Rome after Munda eclipsed all his previous triumphs. He surpassed himself at Munda, and so did Rome surpass herself in the preparations made for his glorious return.

Cæsar's friends were elated with success, while his enemies were paralysed with terror. The news of Munda came upon the latter like a thunderbolt, which crushed all their hopes, and annihilated all their aspirations. They had to yield to the inevitable. Cæsar's brilliant victories, and constant success, carried all before them. Like an irresistible tide they flowed, breaking all barriers, and conquering all difficulties. He was, undoubtedly, the greatest man Rome ever produced: one of those rare geniuses which were destined to change the history of the world.

But, while his fortunes raised him high above people and

officials, his gentleness endeared him to all. He was kind to the citizens, generous to the poor, and magnanimous to his enemies. His greatness rather dazzled than weighed upon the Romans.

No sooner did he set foot in Rome than honours poured upon him in rapid succession. He received the title of Emperor, was appointed Dictator and Præfectum Morum for life, Consul for ten years ; his person was declared sacred ; he obtained a body-guard of knights and senators, his statue was placed in the temples, his portrait was struck on coins, the month Quintilis was called Julius in his honour, and on all public occasions he was permitted to wear the triumphal robe. In the midst of these honours he now proposed to make a digest of the whole Roman law for public use, to found libraries for the same purpose, to drain the Pontine marshes, to enlarge the harbour of Ostia, to dig a canal through the isthmus of Corinth, to quell the inroad of barbarians on the eastern frontier, and to extend the prestige and glory of Rome to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Such was the position of the great man when on the pinnacle of his glory ; but Cæsar was not to stop there. As the excess of failure and despair sometimes turns people mad, so does the excess of brilliant achievements and dazzling glory. Reason gives way before prosperity as it does before adversity. Cæsar the *great* was to become Cæsar the *divine*.

It was late in the evening ; the sky was bright and clear.

But late as it was, the great highway leading from the palace of Cæsar to the temple of Jupiter was lined on both sides with military men, with javelins in their hands, and smiles on their faces. Their hero was shortly to be made their god !

The chatter of the people who crowded to this unique procession, strangely ceased. Then came the clattering hoofs of horses and the clinking swords of soldiers. Surrounded by the noblest men of Rome and the highest senators in office, the Roman General, in full military uniform and mounted on a white horse, rode gallantly on. Straight as arrows stood the soldiers.

Regiment after regiment, as Cæsar passed, saluted their leader with love and veneration. All eyes were turned towards the great man. All men's thoughts were full of his wondrous achievements. He was the life and light of everything.

Cæsar himself, though not a bit changed either in body or soul, seemed to accommodate himself to this exciting occasion. A look of proud grandeur animated his features, a touch of serenity softened his big eyes, a glow of ruddy colour was apparent on his cheeks. But, notwithstanding all these efforts at *looking* superhuman, a voice—a truth-telling voice—rose within him gently whispering—“*Man, thou art mortal!*” Who could listen to the voice of truth when all the flattering and lying tongues of Rome were whispering to him “*thou art divine?*”

Cæsar laughed at first at the idea of his divinity. But how easily is human nature to be deceived when it suits her to be so! By degrees he began to yield to public opinion. Though he often thought that all Rome was wrong and he was right, in this instance he acted differently. Rome might be right after all, he thought to himself; Alexander was the son of Jupiter; Alexander was not greater than Cæsar; the latter was not behind-hand in war and glory. Why should he be so in divine matters?

Amidst the salutes of the soldiers and the cheers of the people the divine-elect pushed on. The moment the procession arrived at the gates of the temple's court Cæsar dismounted, and, still surrounded by his faithful followers, walked firmly on towards the sanctuary.

Entering the holy shrine, alone and unattended, Cæsar was met by the high priest in his official robes, who led him to the interior. As they walked between the marble and granite pillars of the building the divine-elect became solemn and thoughtful. The dim flickering light fell on the majestic pillars, throwing dark shadows. Besides the high priest and the great man not a single human being was in the building. The steps of the two great men, though soft and reverential, might have been distinctly heard in the hush of the temple. The corridors cleared, they now neared that part where the priests consecrated themselves for the performance of their holy office in the sacred building. There, a basin of the finest granite was laid in the centre, filled with pure water. On the marble stand, close by, stood several little alabaster jars filled with precious scents. Beside them were crystal pots containing aromatised sacred ointments for the hair. In the walls there were beautiful wardrobes made of sacred oak trees, polished as glass, and inside them were costly and precious garments made of the purest white linen, and inlaid with pearls and precious stones, the collars and cuffs of gold fringes. In the middle, and between the two wardrobes, was a polished mirror of pure silver ; so well was it polished that, faint and dim as the light was, it reflected the images as if in daylight.

The moment priest and follower reached the spot the high priest stopped abruptly, and with his index-finger pointing towards the granite bath, he said " Here must all flesh be purified

before it is fit to commune with the gods. Lay aside all emblems of worldly authority," he continued, pointing to Cæsar's sword, "for we are in the shrine of the father of the gods." Then he walked towards one of the wardrobes, and, selecting one of the finest priestly suits, he brought it out, putting it upon a white marble stand. "In the holy temple," he continued, "the garb of purity must be substituted for that of the world. With this, and with this alone, you can approach the holiest spot on Roman soil—I shall join you presently." He then quitted the consecration chamber and disappeared in the dim light.

Left to himself, the General looked searchingly about, but, except what has been already described, there was nothing unusual to be seen save the statue of Jupiter.

"Gods-elect," mused he to himself, "like kings-elect, must receive their authority first from those who shall be their subordinates later on; it matters little; obedience in divine, as in military affairs, must be the most important law."

However, he slowly began to take off his garments. Beginning with his sword, he hesitated for a moment. "It is by thee," he said, apostrophising his weapon, "that I became what I am; and by thee I am going to be what I shall be. It is ungrateful to part with thee at this, the most sublime, moment in my existence; but we shall not part for long."

Laying his sword at the foot of the granite basin, he took off his garments. Nothing remained on him save a small locket of gold studded with diamonds, and hanging from a gold chain round his neck; that he could not take off. What was in that precious little locket, which even divinity-elect could not deprive him of? Nothing, nothing except a little lock taken on the day of the General's departure from the

beautiful hair of fascinating Cleopatra. Cæsar, taking the perfumed lock from its case, applied it to his lips and passionately kissed it.

Having at last taken his bath, Cæsar, before putting on his sacred robes, poured one of the little alabaster jars over his body, and then, anointing his hair with the contents of one of the crystal pots, he put on his white robe. It was so richly decorated and studded that it glistened brilliantly. He looked into his reflected image in the silver mirror, and could scarcely recognise himself.

Seating himself on an ivory chair, he waited for the return of the high priest. The delay of the functionary troubled him little, as he had to spend the whole night in the sanctuary. It mattered little whether it was all spent where he was or somewhere else.

His attention was again drawn to the alabaster jars and the crystal pots. Cæsar always loved ointments and scents. It was because of his indulgence in these things and similar luxuries that Cicero judged him to be a harmless creature. His ambition was apparent from the very beginning of his life, but these feminine luxuries counteracted it in the eyes of the great Roman orator. But, great as he was, Cicero was mistaken. Cæsar could combine ambition with elegance; his hair and dress interfered little with the way he handled his sword.

However, the General was not kept waiting very long. The rustle of the high priest's robes was heard in the distance, and the tall figure of the head of the temple came to view.

"Julius Cæsar," said the priest, looking him fully in the face, "all worldly authority, as I have already remarked, ceases in this place. Thou art in the shrine of the great god;

thou art no more either imperator, or præfectum, or consul, or general, or any dignitary whatever. With no title thou camest to the world, and as such thou approachest the superhuman. Julius Cæsar, art thou clean enough to commune with the gods?"

"I have washed my body in the holy water and anointed my head with the sacred ointment," answered the General in a lofty tone.

"Yonder water," answered the functionary of the temple, pointing with his finger to the granite bath, "yonder water can cleanse only the body. If the heart has not been purified with it it has been applied in vain."

"I come with a clean body and a clean heart."

"Hast thou divested thyself of everything that was on thee before thou hadst consecrated thyself with water, and is there nothing on thee save these sacred robes I see?" and the priest looked hard again into Cæsar's face.

The latter, who had been confident that he was closeted alone in the chamber, felt no uneasiness. He believed little in Jupiter and much less in water.

"You see the sacred robes on me," answered Cæsar, evasively.

"Be careful how thou comest into the presence of the gods. Take heed that no article of the defiled world is left upon thee. Above all things take heed that no article *touched by a woman* remains attached to this frail tabernacle. Woman ruins everything, Julius Cæsar, even a god-elect, even a god-elect," repeated he looking straight into his face. "Deceive not thyself; if thou deceivest me thou canst not deceive this god who has been watching every movement of yours." He pointed to the statue of Jupiter before them. "Him thou

canst not deceive, for in this sacred shrine nothing can stand but solid truth."

Cæsar, though an unbeliever in both gods and priests, looked now rather thoughtful and grave; he began to feel somewhat uneasy. It seemed to him as if the venerable old man was endowed with something like secret knowledge, though how he came in possession of it he could not tell. The door of the chamber was shut; there was no other outlet from it. He looked straight into the speaker's face, but besides its grave expression nothing could be discerned.

"Search thyself well," continued the priest. "It is not for me to judge the heart, but there is one who can, and will, do that ere this night comes to an end. There is time yet; if thou desirest it I shall leave thee once more so that thou mayest be able to consecrate thyself afresh. But if thou art ready, follow me."

"I will follow you, lead on," answered Cæsar without hesitation.

The high priest waited no longer. With a slow, soft step he led on, his frame tottering with old age.

Another gallery was crossed. There was no light to dissipate the darkness of the place save the reflected faint light from the outer part of the temple, which gave a strange aspect to the massive building. Cæsar, reverently following the high priest, looked neither right nor left.

Through winding galleries and zig-zag passages, they arrived at last at the innermost sacred chamber, a circular one, all built of granite. In the middle was a huge statue of Jupiter made of the finest brass, the base of which was a broad and massive surface. On each side of the statue was a gold Roman lamp. Before it was a soft cushion for the

high priest to kneel upon, and commune with the gods. Opposite it was a couch embroidered with gold and silver, to afford a few moments' rest whenever the priest felt exhausted with his devotion. At the side of the couch stood a silver case containing the sacred book of the temple.

"I cannot enter with thee," said the high priest to Cæsar, "for as we were crossing the gallery a woman crossed my mind. This alone makes me unfit to tread on this most holy spot."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Cæsar, with a touch of humour even at this sublime moment. "Is woman so dangerous?"

"Much more than thou couldest ever think, Julius Cæsar. Deceive not thyself I repeat to thee; thou never canst deceive the divine nature."

"Then am I allowed now to enter?"

"Yes, if clean."

"I am as clean as a whitewashed wall now."

"To-night will test thy purity. Enter; watch for the sign; it may come early it may come late, but it is sure to come. Watch and pray, for it is awful to be in the presence of the gods!"

As the high priest retraced his way, his footsteps, though soft and slow, sounded clearly in the silence of the night. His form grew dim among the shadowy columns of the temple, until it had vanished altogether. Cæsar was alone!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

JUPITER AND HIS SON.

WITH a firm step the god-elect walked into the sanctum sanctorum. His keen eyes threw a rapid and searching look round the interior of the circular chamber, but only the statue and the couches could be seen.

What was he to do? The high priest recommended him to pray and watch. Prayers he knew none, but every man could watch. Throwing himself down on the sofa, he crossed his arms over his chest, looked straight at the god's statue, and *watched*.

The lamps threw their pale lights into the circular space, and were reflected from the massive brass statue in a flood of splendour. The solemn stillness of the night added to the solemnity of the shrine.

With his arms still crossed on his chest, Cæsar plunged into deep meditations. All his past life flitted before him like a dream. It is in such solemn moments that a man sometimes remembers the most trivial incidents of his past. The days of his boyhood crossed his mind; the comrades of his play—now left far behind in the tremendous chasm which he had made between them and himself—rose before him like shadows; his youth, his former ambitions—now more than realised—his past rank, his previous battles, crossing the Rubicon, Pharsalia, Thapsus, Munda, and a thousand other incidents rose fresh and vivid before his mind's eye; and now he was the

supreme ruler of Rome and the world ; and now again he climbed all the steps of the human ladder whose top seemed to touch Olympus. Before long he was to leave the last step in the ladder and set his feet on divine territory, himself becoming an Olympian—a very god !

He tried with all his might to banish from his brain the idea of woman, but this is exactly what he could not do. Majestic and tall, beautiful and bewitching, rose before him the figure of the Egyptian enchantress. With her dazzling beauty and seductive eyes, he could imagine his first agreeable surprise in the tent. The details of the incident, though remote in time, were yet vivid and fresh in his memory. Her purple royal mantle, her white velvety hand, and her imposing stature on that happy night he first met her, were clearly remembered ; so were also the succeeding days of happiness. Her caresses, her musical voice, and last, but not least, he thought again of that precious lock of her precious hair. With his hand he pressed it tightly against his heart, and as he did so a thrill of pleasure animated him.

“ It is only a few days,” murmured he to himself, “ and we shall meet again.”

The night wore off slowly. The silence became more solemn and awful. Cæsar began to feel that it was rather an annoying business to become superhuman. He would rather have fought a battle than watched a night for his divinity. With the former he would have felt more at home, and there would have been something to take away the monotony of the case. But as he had no choice now he must submit to the high priest's arrangements, watching for the sign of his divine father. It was past midnight now. Cæsar, still sitting and watching, had received no sign yet. But with, or without, any

manifestation of the will of Jupiter, he was determined to be ranked among the gods. Jupiter was the father of the gods, and he was the father of his country. The Roman Senate, not satisfied that this little planet of ours should be the sole orb where their decrees were respected, had now extended them to higher realms, and accordingly *decreed* that Cæsar was divine ; and thus Olympus was brought to the level of Roman territory.

Tired and fatigued, Cæsar stretched himself on the sofa and sought relief in the arms of the goddess, Sleep. He slumbered, with the locket on his heart.

How long he was in the arms of that gentle goddess he could not tell. The lamps threw their light on the circular chamber. The statue of Jupiter glittered. But, nevertheless, Cæsar started. What could have happened to produce that effect on the great man? Nothing, except that the eye-sockets of the statue, which were but a little while ago hollow, were changed now into strange luminous balls, which glowed with beautiful blue light all over the chamber. The god seemed to look straight into the General's face. With the two sparkling eyes it seemed as if life was infused into the whole statue. There was a solemn, but sweet, expression in those emerald eyes. They were not there before he slumbered ; the door of the holy of holies was locked. How those two beautiful emerald gems came there he could not tell.

Rising from his seat, Cæsar stepped a little forward before the divine father, but the flame that darted from those eyes awed him, and like a fascinated being he stood still and looked into them with awe. Sighing, he lifted up his eyes towards the ceiling, and lo ! perpendicularly above his head hung a sharp dagger attached to a thin hair ; so thin was the thread

that the General at first sight supposed it was hanging there by superhuman agency. Slowly but steadily the sharp instrument moved backward and forward pendulum-like, its double edge glittering in the faint light. Pale and trembling, more with disappointment than fear, the great Roman looked bewildered ; but before he could unravel the puzzle a mist or smoke filled the room. How it was generated and whence it came he could not guess, but the haze increased until it dimmed everything before him—everything except the emerald eyes, which kept shining brilliantly like piercing flames. Julius felt giddy and unsteady. A kind of depression took possession of his system ; his sight began to get dim ; a stupefying dulness overpowered his senses, and something like paralysis was affecting him. Presently a sound of thunder split his ears in peal after peal. Higher and wilder the thunder sounded ; more and more the mist increased ; weaker and weaker did the great Roman feel, until quite overpowered with a sensation he could not describe, he fell before the statue helpless. He had lost all but the faculty of hearing, which, though deranged a little, was nevertheless acute and intact.

“Who dares to trouble the peace of the god, in his great sanctuary ?” thundered a voice, solemn and awful. No answer came from Cæsar. How could he answer ?

“Julius Cæsar ! Julius Cæsar !” said the same awful voice. “Beware how thou approachest my sacred shrine. Awful is the presence of the gods, but more awful is their vengeance. The might and power of mortals cease the moment they enter our sanctuary. Swords and armies count as nothing to our infinite strength. Nothing stands here but truth, and nothing totters here but falsehood.”

The mist seemed to have formed into a cloud of light. Cæsar felt like a man in a dream. He tried with all his might to shake off his lethargy, but to no purpose. Helpless and powerless he lay on the marble floor.

“All errors of ignorance,” continued the thundering voice, “all errors of ignorance are pardoned here when they are duly repented of; but wilful and deliberate errors are never pardoned. My wrath will issue forth, and smite the transgressor like a thunderbolt. My sanctuary is pure and holy; art thou such, mortal?”

A pause—an awful pause—followed, as if the god wanted to give the mortal time to realise his state. Again the awful voice thundered:—

“Search thy innermost heart, Julius Cæsar, and see if thou canst say that, with purity, thou has entered the shrine of my repose. Nay, put thy hand against thy heart, and surely wilt thou find over it a relic that confounds both heaven and earth. Not even the sacred robes thou hast on can ever shield thee from such a sacrilege. Thy transgression deserves death!”

There was another pause, deafening thunders sounding in the ears of the prostrate General. The temple seemed to swing to and fro with him; but something more dreadful was swinging above him, though he saw it not.

“Thy transgression deserves death, and death thou should’st have had, but I let not my anger swallow thee. In thy weakness I remember thy virtues; and in my wrath my mercy intercedes for thee. No mortals, except my priest servants, ever heard my voice and lived. To thee, and to thee alone, this privilege is accorded.”

Cæsar heard all, clearly and distinctly, but could not move an inch from the spot.

“In my wrath against thee,” repeated the voice, “I have remembered thy virtue, which atone for thy many sins; and that virtue is thy charity to thy fellow mortals, and thy magnanimity towards thy fallen foes, while in thy hand rests the fate of thy fellow creatures. These are qualities not generally found among mankind. They are noble and god-like. Through them thou art permitted to be a candidate to divinity.

“Thy errors lie more in thy weakness to woman than in ambition for power. In woman, thou imaginest, lies thy happiness. Thou leanest upon a bruised reed; thou sailest in a frail vessel; sooner or later the reed breaks, and the vessel sinks, and thou art a ruined man. Let her not dim thy glory, nor tarnish thy virtue. Strive, with all thy might and main, to free thyself from her beguiling power, and thou art my beloved son. Be enslaved by her deadly charms, yield to her fascinating smiles, and my wrath will devour thee like a consuming fire.

“As thou seest, it is against unlawful love that I warn thee, mortal. It has been the curse of the world in past ages; it shall be the curse of the world in future generations. Thou hast a jewel of a wife, Julius Cæsar; cherish and love her; in her thou shalt find the true happiness which thou, in vain, seekest in others.

“I entrust thee with a great and mighty nation. Rule her with justice. Thou art the servant of the nation; serve her with truth and fidelity. Lead her in the path of goodness; make her happy, and ever let thy example be worthy of the divine father that adopts thee.

“Remember, and remember well, that above thee swings that fatal instrument with which the gods execute their justice. The moment thou betrayest thy trust to the guile of a woman, yonder dagger will accomplish the justice of the gods. The hair snaps, the dagger falls, and with it the life of the transgressor. Let not glory dazzle or blind thee; it is but a bubble, which may vanish in the twinkle of an eye; but the greatness whose foundation is truth, rests unchanged for ever. Rise newly-initiated Son of Jupiter!”

In a moment the mist disappeared, as if by magic; the dagger was no longer swinging over his head; the emerald eyes vanished from the sockets of the statue; the oil lamps burnt no more, and everything was again calm and silent.

Instantly the Son of Jupiter was again on his feet, looking round him, like a man awakening from a dream. He put his hand on his forehead.

The moment he could recover speech, he said to himself, “I would not undergo the same experience again even to be Jupiter himself!”

The sun was high up in the sky; the temple hall was crowded with Roman dignitaries, while in the space round the shrine the multitude gathered in a dense mass. The soldiers and generals of the army were standing in a military attitude.

Cæsar, in his priestly robes, the emblem of divinity, stood on the platform, his face pale with night watching, but still noble. Beside him appeared the high priest, clothed in his richest robes, glistening with gold and precious stones. Round the latter ranged other priests, with white robes and olive branches in their hands.

Solemnly and steadily the high priest lifted up his trembling

arm. Dipping a white brush, with a gold handle, in the sacred oil, he wrote the name of the General, "The Son of Jupiter," after which he poured the rest of the consecrated oil over his head.

Instantly all the nobility and dignitaries knelt, reverentially, before the Newly Initiated Divinity, some prostrating themselves, face downwards, on the marble floor. The singers raised their voices in sacred incantations. The priests waved the olive branches in their hands, bowing their heads to the great figure; and then the curtains of the temple fell, and the god was separated from the mortals.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE FATAL EMBLEM OF AUTHORITY.

THE sun rose in the blue clear sky, and its rays shone on the palaces and houses of the immortal city. Never did Rome look more beautiful or glorious. Her huge towers stood high up over her circumference wall like so many giants in the attitude of defence. Her hills and valleys were carpeted with green grass. The majestic Tiber rolled on, its waters sparkling under the rays of the sun. Though not a feast day, all Rome was astir. The shops were closed, and no business was going on in the city. People were hurrying about in great excitement. Women with infants at their breasts, boys with toys in their hands, and men with smiles or frowns on their faces—all—all were moving along the streets.

The Capitol was crowded with Roman Senators and the greatest dignitaries among the citizens. High above them all, on a platform, sat the Ruler of Rome and the world. His face was a little paler than usual, and a look of anxiety clouded his countenance. Close by him, with a smiling face and bright eyes, sat Mark Antony.

Among the dignitaries of the citizens were conspicuous three influential men. Casca, with his sallow face, was in the centre, while the slender body of Cassius and the melancholy Brutus were on each side. The latter had been back from his Cisalpine province for some time, and was only too eager to grasp an opportunity of witnessing a scene which had no precedent in the history of Rome.

The two friends, Cassius and Casca, looked at one another with a meaning smile. Brutus, with his arms crossed on his chest, was rather meditative. His face was sad—so sad—and reflected the struggle that was going on between love of his country and love of his benefactor.

After a short blunt speech, stating the occasion for this state-meeting, Antony made his way to a little wardrobe, and, bringing from it a beautifully inlaid casket of oak, he returned to his place.

"The farce will soon begin," sneeringly remarked Casca to Cassius.

"And a beautiful farce too, isn't it, Brutus?"

The latter looked anxiously on.

Silence reigned over the crowd, and all eyes were turned towards Antony, and from Antony to Cæsar.

"What need has a divine being like Great Cæsar of such a paltry thing as that?" asked Cassius from Casca, pointing to the inlaid casket.

"Don't you know the General's saying, which has become a proverb?" remarked the latter. "'Better first on a mountain village than second in Rome.' Cæsar is only a god of the second class, and, therefore, he means to apply his maxim here, too: Rather first in Rome than second among the gods!"

"I know very little about his position in Olympus, but I assure you he shall not live to be first in Rome."

"Hush! We are surrounded by people now," answered Cassius, throwing a reproaching look at his friend. They looked towards Brutus. He was passive and motionless, his brows sternly knit.

"It is a good sign," whispered Casca to Cassius. "Leave

him to his own meditations. They are sure to work their way in him at the end."

With a trembling hand, Antony opened the neat inlaid casket and brought out of it a beautiful and precious crown. It was of pure gold, and the rare gems glittered on it like bright stars. The people held their breath, and, with open eyes and mouths, looked astonished. Cæsar averted his gaze, and surveyed the crowd, reading their innermost hearts.

Taking the shining emblem in his hands, Antony stepped gently towards the General, and, kneeling on one knee, he offered it to him, saying :—

"In the name of Rome, I offer you this crown."

The General grasped the precious thing with his right hand, and looked attentively at it.

A murmur—a strange, deep murmur—as of some deep suffering, rose from the multitude.

"See you how his eyes brightened, and his face smiled, at the sight of what has been the dream of his life?" said Cassius to Casca. The latter looked towards his friend, and smiled.

"And see you," said he, "how he turns it hesitatingly in his hand; he would feign put it on his head. What thinkest thou, Brutus?" But Brutus, with his dilated eyes and brows knit, looked at his benefactor as a man sees a friend at the verge of an abyss without being able to help him.

"I wish he would put it on his head," said Casca. "I would forego a whole fortune to see him commit such an act of folly. In doing that he will lose Rome, and we shall gain her."

"If he would only do that!" exclaimed Cassius. "And I

shall guarantee that before this sun sets his head will not remain standing on his shoulders."

"He is rash enough to do it. Mark you how he turns it in his hands. He would rather part with the hand that holds it than with it."

In fact, Cæsar still kept the emblem of authority in his grasp. His eyes yearningly rested upon it, and it seemed as if it was glued to his right hand. Brutus still kept gazing at the General. The murmuring of the multitude died away, and then all eyes centred on the great man. Cæsar looked at the crown and smiled, and then returned it to the giver.

"Mark Antony," he said, whilst handing it back, "the glory of Cæsar does not rest on such a bauble as this. In the name of Rome you offer it, and in the name of Rome I reject it."

A shout—a thundering shout of joy—burst forth from the multitude, who were astonished. They shouted

"Long live the Great Father of his country! Long live the Defender of Rome. Long live Julius Cæsar!"

A look of disappointment was evident on the faces of Cassius and Casca, while a sigh of relief, for the first time, escaped the lips of Brutus.

"He is alert," said Casca to his friend. "What a wily cunning man he is!"

Antony rose from his kneeling posture and addressed the multitude. "Roman citizens!" said he, "the Father of his Country rejects the offer his sons tender him, but, with your permission, I shall once more repeat the offer."

No cheers arose, but a strange quietness came over the crowd.

"There it is!" remarked Casca to his neighbour, "didn't I

tell you? He would rather part with his right hand than the crown. You may be sure he will put it on at last."

Once more did Antony bend the knee before the great man, repeating the same words, and once more did Cæsar grasp the coveted crown, this time with both hands. Smiling and joyful, he toyed with it. One would think that his whole being was absorbed in that which he called "bauble." There was no mistaking the effect it had produced upon him. He kept moving it round and round.

No murmurs rose from the multitude this time. Whether it was fear or love the great man inspired in their hearts nobody could tell. Their expectant attitude pleased Cæsar immensely. He cast round a penetrating and rapid glance. It was quite enough. He knew that victory was once more on his side.

"Groans and murmurs will not make Cæsar relinquish crowns," murmured he to himself, "but obedience and submission might. I shall quit this field of battle like all the rest—a victor."

In the midst of the silence was heard the clear, sharp voice of Cæsar. "A second time this crown has been offered me, and, for the second time, I decline it. What need have I of such a vain toy, when in the heart of every brave and loyal Roman I have a crown far surpassing it in beauty and splendour; it is the crown of love, beside which all the gold of the world counts nothing."

A roar of applause told him what he wanted to know. Hands were lifted up in the air to salute the General; heads were bowed down to him in reverence; the multitude was full of admiring astonishment.

The three friends exchanged looks of wonderment and surprise.

Rising from his posture, Mark Antony once more addressed the crowd, saying, "Bear with me once more, noble compatriots. In the name of Rome, I take the liberty to offer this crown for the third, and last, time." Kneeling, this time on both knees, before Julius Cæsar, he grasped the crown with both hands, and, bowing his head, he offered it for his acceptance.

Again Cæsar smiled, and steadily gazed at the toy. A strange, wild expression in his eyes indicated plainly that if he let his vanity conquer his judgment, the beautiful crown would find a place on his head.

"Put it on, royal Cæsar! put it on, great Cæsar!" shouted several voices from the multitude.

"This makes my victory complete!" murmured Cæsar to himself.

Slowly rising from his seat, his noble figure and features came in full view of the breathless crowds. His keen eyes wandered over the multitude, and, as they did so, there was in them the expression and power of a conqueror, and a royal conqueror too. If there was a man in all the Roman realm who was worthy of this title, that man was Julius Cæsar.

"A Roman citizen," he said, with his clear metallic voice, standing up. "A Roman citizen have I been born, and a Roman citizen I shall die. I live to make Rome happy and glorious; she has now generously thrice offered me this crown, but on *her* beautiful head it shall rest," and, stepping a little forward, he placed the beautiful crown upon the head of the statue of the goddess of liberty standing close by, over which floated the Roman eagle.

Peals of thunder bursting forth from a storm cloud could not

have been more deafening than the outburst of mad enthusiasm that came from the people, as they saw their idol standing beside the statue of liberty, and, with his own hands, gracefully fitting on the crown.

The front ranks of the crowd, breaking the barriers, rushed to the platform where Cæsar was standing, and, with enthusiastic cheers, seized the General and carried him on their arms, high above their heads. As they passed, the rest of the people instantly made way for them, bowing their heads, and some of them even prostrated themselves before him.

“To-day,” murmured Cæsar within himself, as he was carried on the people’s arms, “to-day I have won the greatest and noblest battle in my life—greatest, because I conquered myself, hitherto unconquered; and noblest, because there was no shedding of blood.”

He was carried in triumph to his palace. The moment Cæsar was alone, a knock came at the door of his private room, and Antony appeared.

“Hallo, Mark!” said Cæsar, in his pleasant, familiar way. “You have played your part admirably well.”

“But you have played yours very badly, my lord. Think you that another opportunity will offer itself with the same advantages? If Mark Antony was Cæsar, Cæsar would have been a king.”

“But Cæsar is not Mark Antony.”

“I am not a man of words, my lord, but you have lost a good chance, it may be, for ever.”

“For ever is a hard word, Antony. You are a loyal friend, and a splendid soldier, but you are a clumsy politician. Crowns are like shadows: if we run towards them they flee

before us, but, if we turn our backs to them, they follow us. This is exactly the way to win a Roman crown."

"This is not *my* way of winning it. I would walk straight to it, and grasp it. It is the shortest cut, notwithstanding all your political philosophy, sir."

"You are turning a great wit, Antony; however, my previous battles, and military experience have taught me one thing, and this is patience. It is with *patience*, rash man, that great generals win the day. A lesson learnt at the cost of so many thousand lives is not to be discarded, and I shall be a fool if I don't get my share of instruction from it. Nothing could have persuaded me to keep that crown, except opposition. If the citizens of Rome had kept howling and groaning like wild animals, Cæsar would have been this moment a king. Saw you not how I grasped it all the tighter when they groaned, and relinquished it all the easier when they came back to their senses? With my brave officers and soldiers backing me I would have assumed both crown and sceptre, even if it were to flood all Rome with blood. Obstinacy I can oppose with the sword, but love—never."

"Your generosity may prove your ruin one day."

"There you may be right, Antony; but no more of this; let us to wine and amusement."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE FATAL ARRIVAL.

THINGS came to pass as the great politician predicted. Rome was mad with admiration of Cæsar, and nothing short of putting a crown on his head satisfied their wild enthusiasm. The General was always indifferent on the subject, and, whenever it was mentioned before him, he would not hear of it. This was exactly the road to the crown ; he was flying from it, and it was now following him.

It was late in the afternoon when Brutus, with an uneasy manner, was pacing his study up and down. A dark cloud dimmed his countenance. He had tasted very little food that day ; he was in no mood to see anybody, and even avoided the society of his beloved Portia. Almost exhausted with melancholy thoughts and forebodings, he stayed his walk and flung himself on a comfortable chair, and, leaning his arm against a table before him, he inclined his head, but not to sleep. A valet entered the room and announced Cassius. Scarcely was he announced when the latter made his appearance.

“Good gracious!” began Cassius, taking his brother’s hand, “one would think you had the fever ; and to judge from your appearance you look very ill.”

“O, that’ll pass off,” replied Brutus, trying to look cheerful. “It is only a slight headache.”

“Rome does not agree with you after Cisalpine Gaul, brother.”

"I wish I hadn't left my province," answered Brutus sulkily. "What news in Rome to-day, Cassius?"

"The news of Rome is the news of Cæsar, sir; it would have been more proper to ask what news of Cæsar to-day, good brother."

"Well, what news of Cæsar?"

"Bless my soul! are you a stranger in Rome?"

"I have heard this morning the strange rumours that are going about in the city, but I believe them not."

An ironical laugh relaxed the features of Cassius; a look of confidence indicated that he had the better conviction of the two.

"Pest upon those Roman dogs!" he said impetuously. "With their fawning flattery, and slavish airs, they can do nothing now. The noble old spirit of the citizens is gone; it is buried with our forefathers. Rome is standing on the verge of destruction, and if there are no honest and valiant men to rescue her, she will slip into the yawning abyss."

Brutus looked grave. These were exactly his own convictions on the subject, though he repressed them. The wily Cassius struck the right key.

"It is to brave Romans," continued he, "that our dead forefathers appeal from their graves. To every honourable Roman the path of duty is clear. With our blood we won our liberty, and with our blood we shall have to retain it."

"Is it possible," said Brutus after a moment's thought, "that Cæsar will commit such a rash act? Thrice the crown of Rome has been offered him, and thrice did he reject it. Will he accept another one now?"

"It is not so much Cæsar as Rome that wants to adorn his head with the crown. It is there where the danger lies. This

man has, through his cunning and dexterous ways, driven the Romans into a madness of enthusiasm that makes them forget both their honour and liberty. They have become pigs ; and Cæsar knows only too well how to fill their stomachs with dainty food and good wine. If you treat them to-day, I guarantee the next you shall be dictator. Cæsar is becoming a constant threat and menace to the public safety. Rome offers him a new crown now, and why should he reject it ? It becomes his baldness pretty well, and flatters his vanity. He fooled all Rome in rejecting the crown which that simpleton of an Antony offered him. What they would have done *grudgingly* before, they now do with cheerfulness—pest upon them ! They offer the tyrant chains with which to bind their hands and feet, and why shouldn't he do it ? ”

Brutus, with his brows dark and knit, once more laid his elbow on the table, and his head on his hand. He looked like a man distracted. Cassius noticed the omens, and lost no time.

“ He who hazards nothing,” he insinuated with a wise look, “ gains nothing. In the cause of Rome I hazard everything. Nay, I would willingly lose my life in the cause of my country. I would lay a thousand lives, if I had them, to regain Rome that nobleness of character, and that high sense of honour, before which all the world bowed with submission and veneration. Oh ! to what depth have we fallen ! Awake ye men of valour from your cold graves, and look with shame and horror at the dishonour of your city and country ! Awake Fabius and Scipio, awake Brutus and all brave souls that left behind them immortal honour and glory to be tarnished and dimmed by the effeminacy of your compatriots.”

Brutus was dumb. The wily Cassius was speaking the

thoughts which had troubled him all the day. A consuming fire raged in his system; to that fire his brother was adding more fuel than ever.

After a long pause Brutus looked into his brother's face. "It cannot be, Cassius," he said. "I have painfully meditated over the whole affair; I cannot enter into treacherous designs against the man to whom I owe my life."

The face of the visitor turned ashy pale. After this burst of eloquence and patriotism he expected a different answer.

"You have wavered long enough, Marcus Brutus. Your country will see her deliverance without you; but on you rests for ever the name of coward and traitor. Live to see your country trodden under the feet of a Roman tyrant and an Egyptian Queen."

Like a man touched to the quick, Marcus Brutus rose to his feet indignant. In the last unexpected piece of news he forgot the insult thrown into his teeth by his brother. Like a lion wounded with the spear of a hunter, he startled and raged.

"What say you of the Egyptian?" asked he, with a catch in his breath.

"I say that your friend Cleopatra, the Queen of the Alexandrians, is expected to arrive here every day, when she shall reign supreme over us; and between her and Cæsar the Romans will be trodden to the ground."

"Cassius! Cassius! beware how you play with my feelings! I swear to you by heaven that if you are turning my house into a place for lies to win me against my best friend, dearly as I love you, we must cross swords in combat, and that very soon."

"I forgive your language Brutus, but upon the honour of a Cassius, Cleopatra Ptolemy will shortly be in Rome. How I

came in possession of this news is a different story ; but she left Alexandria more than four weeks ago. She may arrive here at any moment.

Brutus put his hand to his heart, evidently in pain. Then he said, fiercely :—

“ What does she come to Rome for ? ”

“ What for ? Bless my life, this is the simplest question to answer. She comes to be wedded to Julius Cæsar, and, with him, to reign over us, turning Rome into another Alexandria.”

“ What grounds have you, Cassius, for this statement ? ”

“ My ground is that Cinna is charged by Cæsar to deliver a speech in the Senate proposing the repeal of the law prohibiting intermarriage with foreign nations ; and that Cæsar will support this with all the weight of his authority ; and that the day Cleopatra is expected to arrive here the oration will be delivered.

“ Enough, brother, and learn this well—if your statements are false there is an end to all friendship between us, and you shall not expect any treatment from me save that of a mortal enemy ; but if, on the contrary, they prove to be well-founded, then be sure where Cassius says *yes* Brutus will not say *no*. No one in this world could stand between me and Cæsar but that infernal woman.”

Scarcely had he finished his remarks when his valet appeared and announced another visitor. Suddenly, in a triumphant air, but breathless, Casca rushed into the room.

“ Well ? ” asked Cassius from him anxiously.

“ Well,” answered Casca, with a sardonic laugh on his sallow face, “ Cinna has just delivered his oration, and Cleopatra has just arrived ! ”

A groan like that of a sorely stricken man escaped from the bosom of Brutus. Extending his hand to both friends, he exclaimed, " You have conquered at last ! "

CHAPTER XL.

THE POLITICS OF CÆSAR AND THE POLITICS OF
CLEOPATRA.

It was the evening of the Ides of March ! Cæsar, standing on the balcony of his palace, looked on the beautiful view before him. " Before the sun sets a second time," he thought to himself, " I shall have been privileged to bear a royal title," and taking a parchment in his hand he read its contents attentively.

By the time he had finished reading the sun had already set behind the hills ; the purple colour had faded ; the mountains were black in the distance, and all was subdued and calm. Cæsar noticed the rapid change that had taken place, and he shook his head and smiled. " Nature is as inconstant as a human being ; but what matters ?" added he with indifference, " when the future of a man is bright the dull views round him cannot affect his career."

It wanted two hours to the second quarter of the night, when the Roman General girded his sword and threw his mantle round his body. Alone, with no guards or attendants, he mounted his horse and trotted out from the court of his palace. Reaching the main road, he spurred the animal, and at full gallop took a direction leading to a certain place in the suburbs of the city, the clatter of the horse's hoofs echoing far and wide in the stillness of the night.

There was a full moon, but now and then a cloud marred

the face of heaven. Cæsar noticed neither moon nor clouds. On he went, galloping over the broad road. After an hour's gallop the horse, as if taught by previous experience, suddenly stopped of his own accord before a solitary but huge building. The number of slaves and servants that were walking about in the spacious front of the palace, and the number of candles that blazed from the windows, told plainly that it was inhabited by some personage of great importance.

Throwing the reins to one of the attendants expressly waiting at the door, Cæsar mounted the broad flights of steps one after the other, until he was before the state-hall of the palace, which he entered with a light heart and firm step.

The hall was richly and tastefully furnished according to the Roman style. The curtains were gracefully let down to the ground ; the floor was adorned with magnificent carpets ; the chairs were of silver and pure ivory ; tables inlaid with gold, and even gems, were arranged in the saloon ; brackets of all kinds and shapes were stuck on the walls and corners ; sofas of the costly Tyrian purple were placed in the corners of the hall, while several gold lamps hung down from the ceiling, almost turned night into day.

On one of the Tyrian sofas reclined a young lady in the prime of youth, arrayed in white silk, the locks of her hair falling down to her waist. Her cheeks glowed with ruddy health, and her black eyes sparkled. Her hands were as white as ivory. An expression of intense satisfaction on her face made her the picture of beauty and happiness.

Who was this rare beauty ? There was only one woman in her time possessing all these fascinating qualities, and that woman was Cleopatra Ptolemy, the Queen of the Alexandrians as she used to call herself both in fun and earnest.

Into this earthly paradise did Cæsar walk, his face beaming with joy, and his eyes dancing with light.

The moment the royal beauty perceived the tall manly figure of the Roman General she rose up to her feet, and with a light step and bright smile she met him at the door. The Dictator, entwining his arms round her white beautiful neck, impressed a passionate kiss on her rosy lips. No blush mounted to her cheeks, but, on the contrary, with a graceful supple movement she returned the compliment, her eyes beaming with delight all the while.

Hand-in-hand, both Queen and Dictator walked towards the Tyrian purple sofa, the colour of which contrasted pleasantly with the beautiful white silk dress of her Majesty, designed no doubt as an emblem of her purity.

"You have been rather late to-night, darling," said the Queen, with her arm round the Dictator's waist.

"I have been busy preparing documents for to-morrow. If *I* do nothing in Rome nothing is done in Rome. When pressed by work I have no time to eat, scarcely any to breathe. The world envies me for my position, but I often sigh for the good days of old, when I had no care on my mind, and no responsibility on my shoulder; but now with the huge Capitol on both of them, I have no time to know what rest means, and this is," he added with a bitter smile, "and this is what the world calls greatness."

"True," remarked Cleopatra, with a graceful smile, "I know that by experience myself. Often I have had to sit up late at night drawing up my lists of executions for the next day, and I assure you it is hard work. Many a night have I kept writing until my hand got tired. I pitied," added her Majesty with a laugh, "I pitied the executioner,

for if my hand got tired of writing, how much more his hand must have got tired of working! But such men sometimes do their work with less trouble and fatigue than we do our writing."

Cæsar was so much absorbed in his own meditations that he scarcely comprehended what his royal love was saying.

"To-morrow," he broke out, "shall be a great day in the history of Rome. To-morrow the Capitol puts her trust in one single man, and her authority in one single hand, but none of these two things shall ever be abused. My life and being must be spent to further the happiness and glory of my country. If these two objects are not attained, my life has been lived in vain."

"Then we shall have a happy and glorious future."

"That we shall. The speech for the repeal of the law prohibiting intermarriage between Romans and other nationalities has already been attended to and settled. To-morrow I shall have two precious ornaments, a crown to adorn my head, and a Queen to gratify my heart. Beautiful Cleopatra Ptolemy will be then the consort of Julius Cæsar." With a warm kiss on her forehead the Dictator hugged her close to his heart

A bright flush, not of bashfulness but of joy, mounted to the Queen's face and lips. Now was the dream of her life realised, now was her ambition to be attained—the Queen of the Romans, the Queen of the whole world!

"You have everything ready for the occasion?" asked Cæsar smilingly.

"Everything, even my lists have been drawn two or three days ago," replied her gracious Majesty, and with the swift-

ness of a gazelle she flew to her study, and bringing a few parchments in her hand, she returned with a light step and a lighter heart.

"Here they are," said Cleopatra, as she handed them to Cæsar.

Throwing a rapid glance at them, Cæsar looked from the parchments to his love and from her to them. Over five hundred names of the noblest and ablest men of Rome were down on them.

"Bless my life!" cried he, at a loss what to make of them; "what do your parchments mean?"

"Why!" answered the daughter of Ptolemy, "these are the men I picked for the occasion."

"But, my dear, we cannot force men to attend the ceremony of our wedding, though all shall be requested to do so."

A laugh—a wild laugh—burst from the rosy lips of the Queen, sounding through the magnificent hall. Cæsar looked astonished.

"Haven't I already informed you what my lists mean?" cried she, with an angelic expression on her innocent face.

The Dictator, who had been abstracted when her Majesty complained of the fatigue that overcame her while drawing up her evening lists in Alexandria, was quite at a loss to understand what she meant.

"These are the lists of the executions!" said she at last with an open and frank face.

In battle Cæsar was terrible and relentless, but the critical moment over, he was the most kind-hearted of all the Romans. Not once did he abuse the power he wielded; never did he once countenance the shameful practice of his time in proscribing men, and despatching enemies by foul play. To sit

down and write in cold blood names of persons to be executed the next day was more than his magnanimous nature could stoop to do.

On a different occasion these parchments would have produced a dreadful shock to the Dictator. This time it only startled him and made him reflective.

“Good heavens!” he cried, in a fit of astonishment, “but what did all these people do to deserve such a fate?”

“It is not what they have done,” answered the royal beauty, “but what they may do. You know, darling,” repeated her Majesty with a fascinating smile, “in politics I have one rule, a golden one: *it is always better to err on the safe side.*”

“This is exactly my own rule, and this is why I always treat my friends with generosity and my enemies with magnanimity. I may do a man wrong if I treat him harshly, kindness may make him a better man if he didn’t deserve it, while severity may be doing him injustice. But, heaven pardon me! you have on your lists the ablest and best men of Rome.”

“Ah, there you have it!” cried her gracious Majesty. “The danger of crowned heads always lies in what you call able and good men. One day they may turn against you, while their ability and goodness make them all the more dangerous.”

“I would rather have my life endangered than be guilty of such a dreadful abuse of power. I have ever been and must always be kind and gentle to my compatriots. What! let history say that Cæsar was a wicked tyrant? Never! There are stories abroad, even now, of conspiracies formed against my head, and I have been advised not to leave my palace unattended. But see, I have come here just as I am, with no followers or guards, for my best guard is the love I inspire into my compatriots. I must make Rome prosperous and happy,

more glorious and great than she has ever been. I rule by love. It is with this gentle goddess I began my reign, and it is with her I shall end it."

"The Alexandrians taught me to rule otherwise, and instead of ruling by love I rule by death; and, of the two, the latter is surely the safer plan."

"But Rome is a little different from Alexandria, and here you have to change your tactics, madam. We must be happy, but we must make other people happy, too,"

"Humph!" murmured Cleopatra to herself, "there is no use discussing matters now. I shall have plenty of time to carry out my plans later on."

"Well, we shall act according to circumstances," she answered. "Well, is Calphurnia reconciled to her fate now?" she asked, trying to change the subject.

"I haven't broken the news to her yet. I am thinking of doing it to-morrow morning. Confound it!" continued Cæsar, with a sad look, "I can march forward and storm the greatest stronghold in the world, but to face an innocent woman and tell her that I have ceased loving her, is what I cannot do."

"So she is still in blessed ignorance?"

"Yes, poor creature, she is," and a mournful look came into his face.

At that moment different kinds of delicious wines and confectionery were brought in on gold trays and placed on an ivory table before the two lovers.

The wine cheered up the spirits of the warrior, and dissipated his gloom. Nevertheless, a kind of secret melancholy lingered behind.

"Some people are apt to think," continued the Dictator,

“that Cæsar is a tyrant. If I live long enough this delusion will soon pass off, and they shall see in their tyrant their best benefactor.”

“We have to suffer from the calumny of the world,” rejoined her Majesty; and seeing the wine before her, she could not help remembering the little accident that befell her younger brother. “You have no idea how much I suffer from the world’s scandals. It is only a few months ago that rumours in Alexandria went about that I poisoned my brother. How horrible! horrible!” continued her Majesty in a simulated fit of righteous anger. “I could execute as many guilty people as I choose; I do it in broad daylight. But to have recourse to poison! Oh, heavens! the mere idea drives me mad.”

“I care little what the world might say of me,” answered Cæsar, “if my conscience does not condemn me. Though the world call me divine I have faults and weaknesses like every other mortal. My weakness is the weakness of all human nature—woman. But I have never injured or done injustice to any man in my life and never shall. I have always done my utmost to be kind to friends and enemies.”

With wine, and conversation, and a beautiful young lady, time passes off insensibly; and so it did on this royal occasion. The clock sounded the beginning of the last quarter of the night. Cæsar no sooner heard it than he jumped to his feet.

“Already?” asked his royal love.

“I never thought it was so late. I have a heap of parchments waiting for me at home, and they must be read and others written before another sun rises; and now I must take my leave of you till to-morrow.”

"Till to-morrow," echoed the happy Queen, as she offered him her lips to kiss.

As Cæsar reached the door a thought struck him, and he turned back at once.

"I must see my son," said he with a sad smile.

"He is sound asleep, now."

"No matter, I shall not disturb him; I only want to take a look at him."

"Very well," answered the Queen; and, leading on, they arrived at the chamber where the young prince lay asleep.

With an authoritative wave of the hand, Cleopatra ordered the nurse that was watching beside him to withdraw while the Dictator stepped in.

On a beautiful bed, luxuriantly decorated, with pure silk curtains overhanging it, lay the infant prince. He was beauty personified. His rosy cheeks full of life, his beautiful curly locks hanging on his forehead, his pretty, round face, his long eyelashes gracefully embracing each other as his black eyes lay closed in sleep, stirred the emotions of the Dictator to their very depths. This was the only child he ever had, and all his dignity and rank, his greatness and ambition—all—all gave way to the noble and sublime feeling of the *father*.

Cæsar gazed on his child for some time. All his being was absorbed in the innocent young creature that lay before him. If the infant prince had the beauty of his mother, surely he had the noble expression and the decided features of his father.

Softly and gently Cæsar stepped cautiously forward, and knelt before the infant as he never knelt before a god. Laying his right hand on the downy pillow on which rested the little head of the prince, the warrior bent gently forward and

impressed a long, passionate, warm kiss on his lips. It was the sacred kiss of a father to his child. The lips of Cæsarion unconsciously moved, in the manner little children do in sleep, as if in the act of returning his father's embrace. Cæsar rose up, and as he did so two big tears dropped down and bedewed the pure white silk of the bed!

CHAPTER XLI.

THE DREAM OF CALPHURNIA.

THE night was chilly, but the moon-lit sky was bright and clear. The objects flew before Cæsar's eyes as he galloped rapidly on his noble horse, and he gave himself no time for thought. Reaching the city, he pulled the reins a little tighter, to give his mind time for reflection as well as rest to his animal. All Rome was buried in deep sleep. All the houses were without light, and looked solemn and indistinct. All was obscure except a little palace on one of the highest hills of Rome which caught the eye of Cæsar.

"It is the palace of Brutus," murmured he to himself. "He is busy preparing for the occasion which will take place to-morrow; he is a dear friend. To-morrow shall see him a greater man than he is to-night. Work hard, my beloved Brutus," he mused half in speech, "work hard only a few hours more, and to-morrow you shall have the reward of loyalty and devotion."

Slowly did he walk his horse in the by-paths of the city, but now and then turned a lingering look towards the lighted building.

Just before gaining the road leading to his own palace, a man, wrapped in a black mantle, and his face muffled with a black shawl, was taking the road leading to the palace he had just passed. As they met, the stranger looked straight into Cæsar's face, and recognised him. The former's hand

was instantly brought to his sword, but Cæsar had already passed him.

“This man,” murmured the Dictator, to himself, “is, in all probability, going to his love as I was to mine. Well, love, like human nature, levels us all.”

Arriving at his abode, Cæsar threw the rein of his horse to one of the servants, and, with a quick step, advanced, his sword sharply clinking against the edge of the steps. A minute later, he was in his bedroom.

On a bed of costly furnishing lay a woman, serene and in sleep. Her face was very beautifully cut and shaped; an attractive colour tinged its centre, and faded by degrees into paleness. Her hair, tied with a simple ribbon behind the neck, came luxuriantly round about her shoulders. The lashes of her eyelids were long. Beauty and pathos mingled on her face. Nobody could guess what secret grief was gnawing into her soul, but Cæsar knew it. He stood before the sleeping figure and watched. The breathing was slow, but regular; gentleness was written on the face, virtue and purity of character were visible. Cæsar read them then, as he always did, and the reproaching voice of conscience was heard at his heart.

Throwing his mantle, and ungirding his sword, he sank into the sofa opposite the bed, and crossed his arms. Before him lay the figure of his wife; to-morrow will see her divorced. He tried, with all his powerful memory, to recall an incident in her life when that pure and innocent creature was at fault. He could not. Always she had been pure, loving, obedient, and innocent. Noble in character, and great in soul, she was the one woman fit to be the wife of Julius Cæsar. Self-denying, self-sacrificing, she was ready to die for him, if it only

could but make him happy. And the reward she was to receive, the next day, for all her devotion, was humiliation and misery for life! A shiver passed over Cæsar's heart as he thought of such a future.

"What was her fault?" that was the thing that Julius Cæsar was trying to find, but could not discover. Not the least pretext could he find to appease the righteous voice of conscience. Her only fault was that a dangerously fascinating woman stood between him and her.

These thoughts were still revolving in the mind of the General, when a shrill scream suddenly escaped from the sleeping figure before him.

"Help! help! help!" she cried, with all the strength of her voice, while her limbs shook in a way terrible to witness.

Instantly Cæsar was on his feet, standing beside the bed. Pale and trembling, he looked on her distorted figure.

"What ails thee Calphurnia?" he asked, sadly.

"For heaven's sake, be quick!" she again cried, in the same shrill voice.

"Calphurnia!"

"Quick, quick, he is on the verge of destruction!" she screamed, in wild terror.

"Who is on the verge of destruction?"

"My darling, my beloved Cæsar. Help! help!"

"Calm thyself, Calphurnia."

Then, turning her eyes towards the dark corner of the room, she looked the very picture of despair.

"They murder him! They murder him!" she shrieked.

"They murder whom, Calphurnia?"

"Didn't I tell you? It is my darling, my dearest Cæsar."

"Who murders him?" asked the Dictator, with a chilly heart.

"There! there! blood! blood!" Then, covering her face with her hands, as if to avoid a dreadful sight, she cried out, "there! it touches him! They have pierced him! Murder! Murder!"

"Who pierced him?"

"Ah, the cowards! Ah, the traitors!"

"Who are they? Who are they?"

Sitting up in her bed, she opened her eyes wildly.

"Don't you see them, here?" she answered, in an impatient frantic way. "I see everyone of them. There is Cassius and Casca, Trebonius and Cinna. Yonder sits Ligarius and Cimber, Volumnius and Messala. But oh, heavens! Whom do I see, among them, too? That traitor, that greatest of all traitors! He, too, thrusts his dagger into his side. He falls! He falls! Oh, great gods! He falls, all covered with blood! Murder! murder! Help! help!"

"She has gone mad!" muttered Cæsar to himself. "There is nobody here, dear Calphurnia."

"Nobody?" shrieked she, in the highest pitch of her voice, "nobody? Don't you see the room is full of murderers and assassins? I can see them, one by one, with their mantles round their bodies, and their treacherous daggers hid in their treacherous bosoms. There! he rises again, and struggles like a wounded lion. See you not how he wields his sword against this gang of butchers? Rescue him, rescue him! Oh, ye cowardly senators, is there none amongst you who could rescue Cæsar? Is there no loyal and brave friend among you who could draw sword in his defence? No! You are all cowards! There, again he staggers! Again he falls! Oh,

he is dying—dying! dead! dead!” and then, covering her face with both hands, she fell backwards and swooned away.

Her face looked like that of a corpse. Her breathing was faint and low. On her features sat dull despair.

The blood turned icy cold in Cæsar's veins. His face was ghastly, his eyes dilated, and he was dazed with a mortal terror. From a gold goblet, on a stand beside the bed, he sprinkled water on the face of his wife. With repeated sighs she suddenly opened her eyes, and wildly looked round. She could scarcely believe her senses. She had had a most horrible dream, for was she not in her own apartment?

Without a single word, without a single gesture, she entwined her delicate white arms round the man she so dearly loved, and pressed her lips—still white with fright—upon his. A blush of shame and self-reproach tinged his cheeks as he looked down at the innocent, loving figure. What a difference between her and that wicked Egyptian Queen! The cruelty of the latter irresistibly forced itself upon his mind. Her royal Majesty could sit down a whole night drawing long lists of people to be executed the next day; she complained of the fatigue that overcame her fingers. She could pity the headsman; but had no sympathy with those unfortunate creatures who were led to death like sheep; no pity on father or mother who witnessed the execution of their sons and daughters. He remembered her long list of 500 noble Romans to be executed on their wedding day as a token of goodwill towards Rome. All these things ran through his mind. He compared Cleopatra's cruel nature with the gentleness of Calphurnia—her virtues, the horror she experienced at the sight of blood, the repugnance she had to treachery, the frantic terror she showed at the danger that threatened him in

her dream, her sincere manifestations of love and devotion to him; and this was the woman whose reward was to be divorce!

These bitter thoughts made havoc with his peace of mind whilst he was still locked in the arms of his devoted wife. As he dwelt on the wrong he had done her, and the heartless cruelty which he was going to commit against her, his eyes were moist with repentant tears.

"Oh, what a horrible dream!" said Calphurnia, beside herself with joy. "But, thank the gods, it is only a dream."

"What was it?" asked Cæsar.

"I can remember nothing of it just now; only something vague and terrible weighed upon my soul—I would gladly have given my life to see you as you are now."

"But, darling," she continued, perceiving for the first time that his eyes were wet with tears, "what ails thee, darling? It was only a foolish dream, and you should not take it to heart."

Cæsar looked steadily into her face. Then slowly he bent both knees before the Princess; his arms, crossed on his chest, touched the edge of the bed.

"I dare not come nearer to thee, Calphurnia, for I have wronged thee, and wronged thee deeply."

The Princess lifted up her eyes and was bewildered. For several weeks she had been suffering secretly but terribly. The vague rumours concerning Cæsar and Cleopatra had already found way to her ears. She had lately noticed a decided change in the behaviour of the Dictator towards her. He was always kindness and gentleness, but he withheld that warm affection and love he generally lavished on her. She never hinted at the subject. Her princely character scorned to doubt

the purity of her husband. The more the rumours increased the more she suffered in secret, but the more nobly did she bear herself up.

Inconstancy and infidelity, in those days of loose morals, were a matter of course, and nobody thought anything strange or unbecoming about them. To feel that he had done wrong was therefore a great moral virtue in Cæsar, while to confess his error was one of the noble things that few men of his time would have dreamt of doing.

"I have gone astray from the path of duty, honour, and love," he gasped; "I am unworthy of thee. On my knees, with my arms crossed on my chest, I beg thy forgiveness, Calphurnia; and dare I hope it will be granted me?"

The silence that ensued weighed heavily on both wife and husband. It was so still that their breathing alone broke the silence.

At last the Princess looked with pity and compassion upon the prostrated figure before her. For a moment her womanly pride choked her voice, but in broken tones she at length replied.

"I never care to know the erring Julius Cæsar. I only know the kindness of my husband. Thy faults I forgive and forget; thy love and greatness I remember and cherish." Extending her hand to the warrior, who was sobbing like a child, she affectionately took him into her arms, and all was joy and peace.

CHAPTER XLII.

CONSPIRACY IS RIFE.

It was past midnight when a small company of men, with swords at their sides and mantles round their bodies, were quietly directing their steps towards a lofty palace on an eminence. The night was still, and the men were almost as noiseless as the silent night. With faces covered and heads bent to the ground, they looked more like ghosts than human beings.

In one of the windows of the palace towards which they walked a man, with an anxious look on his face, stood looking gloomily into the sky. The stars were visible in the firmament. On how many crimes had they looked down! on how much wickedness and bloodshed! Yet unblenched they shed their light upon our troubled planet!

Brutus looked from his palace window at the stars, and a bitter smile crossed his features. He thought they twinkled in approval of the designs that were to be put in execution on the morrow. It never for a moment occurred to him that these brilliant specks, like the eyes of Heaven, were looking down upon him in pity and contempt. The flatterers had succeeded in persuading the man that he was striking in the cause of virtue when he was really striking in the cause of jealousy.

His meditations were soon broken. The company of conspirators had now reached his palace. His virtuous

brother and his virtuous companions entered with stealthy steps, and still muffled faces.

"Do you see yonder stars," remarked Brutus to them as they entered, pointing with his finger towards the Pleiades. "See yonder stars, how they smile on us? Even Heaven smiles approval on our project."

"How many wonderful things will take place before these stars rise another night!" remarked Casca, throwing off the concealment of his fox-like face.

"What a strange resemblance there is between this night and that on which we had the adventure in the Egyptian city!" observed Lucilius, casting a meaning look at Brutus. "Even at this late date the incidents of that adventure still haunt my memory like an evil spirit. We bled that night for the sake of Rome. It is now somebody else's turn to bleed for her sake."

"Oh, it was the incidents of that night that first poisoned my friendship to Cæsar," answered Brutus, his face turning white with passion at the recollection of those past events. "It is since that night that the peace of my mind has been troubled. It was to no purpose that I often tried to stifle the voice that rang in my ears for redress and revenge. Cæsar will bleed for Cleopatra, but Cleopatra, in her turn, must bleed for Cæsar."

"Remember she is a woman," put in Lucilius.

"Quite so. But there are other ways to make people bleed than shedding their blood. That witch of a woman will neither reign in Rome, nor will she be allowed to reign again in Egypt. She is a fiend, sent from the lower regions as a curse to the land where she resides. Egypt groaned for a good many years under her spell, and she has not set

foot in Rome for many days before she is making the latter groan also. To-morrow will be the climax of her wickedness. Woman has been at the source of every trouble from the beginning of the world, and women shall be at the source of every trouble to the end of it!"

"Nothing could have stood between me and Cæsar," continued Brutus, after a moment's pause. "But that woman——"

"Say you nothing about his ambition?" put in Cassius, moralising.

"I could have forgiven him his ambition, because it is but natural that a man of Cæsar's ability and genius should be of Cæsar's ambition. Ambition, like all the other passions of a man, wears away by time. Cæsar is declining now towards an age when wisdom curbs imagination, and sobriety ambition; and Rome can very well afford a few years' toleration, but to be trodden under the foot of an Egyptian witch—never! Cæsar must die for Cleopatra's ambition, and Cleopatra must suffer for Cæsar's death."

"What a great help Cleopatra has unconsciously been to my own aims! If it had not been for her Majesty it would have gone very hard with Cassius without Brutus," chuckled Cassius within himself, as he heard his brother's remarks.

"Well, gentlemen," continued Brutus abruptly, "time runs fast, we must to business now."

The ringleaders took off their muffles and mantles, and took seats round a big table, at the head of which Cassius took his place, intimating thereby that perhaps he should be in due time the recognised head of the future Government.

"To-morrow," remarked the latter. "To-morrow is the

time appointed for the coronation of Cæsar. Cæsar always called the crown a bauble, but methinks he is only too fond of it. It has been the dream of his life; it has been the height of his ambition."

"Cæsar played Rome a clever trick when he rejected the crown offered him by Mark Antony," said Casca, with a grin, "and we see the result of the trick. He rejects one crown to receive another, but he shall be out-tricked to-morrow."

"Are we to sound anybody else on the bloody business of the morrow?" asked Decimus Brutus.

"I think it would be wise to have Cicero's good opinion of our transactions. The weight of his authority will be sure to turn the balance of public opinion in our favour."

"That's another man that might agree with me as another ladder to dictatorship," mused Cassius within himself at the suggestion. "Let us have him," he said aloud, with eagerness.

"It is the greatest mistake that we can possibly make," replied Brutus. "It is Cicero's fault that Cæsar lives yet. If he had incriminated him in the Catiline conspiracy, he would have been swept away with the rest of the dangerous conspirators. But Cæsar's hair and neat dress deceived the old orator, and the smooth young man, who was not thought worth taking notice of, became in due time the master of Rome."

"This is a stronger reason why Cicero should be informed on the subject," answered Cassius, eager to enlist the services of the illustrious philosopher. "He is the last man to agree to tyranny."

"There cannot be much practical good in taking the

opinion of a grey-headed man in such an emergency. If we succeed, success justifies everything, but if we fail another head heaped in the basket, where ours will already be cast, cannot be of much comfort to us. Besides, Cicero is a strange man, and has sometimes strange notions regarding right and wrong. His philosophy might sentence our intended deed as criminal, and instead of making an ally we make an enemy of him. It is better and safer to do without him."

"I believe you are right, Brutus," remarked Lucilius. "Better without the old philosopher. The less moral philosophy we have in the business the better."

"Strike him off," ordered Cassius, in a dictatorial manner. "You are right, Lucilius; I hate philosophising, and especially in such circumstances. If there was nothing against enlisting him but his philosophy, it is quite enough; but what think you of Popilius Lena?"

"We shouldn't have him either," put in Metellus Cimber. "It is not wise to risk it. If he will side with us we can't be much stronger, while if he sides against us will ruin us and our cause."

"He is one of those beings, who, though able, are quite indifferent to the political aspect of affairs," remarked Decimus Brutus. "If the Republic stands or falls, and whether Cæsar lives the master of Rome or dies the tyrant's death, it is all a matter of perfect indifference to Popilius Lena."

"He is a shrewd man, but a bad politician," said Casca. "On the eve of our action it is wiser to speak to none. What concerns us more now is to arrange, not who must strike with us, but who must perish with the tyrant."

"It is self-evident," replied Cassius, "that as Antony stands by Cæsar he must fall by Cæsar. Besides, it is unkind

to let a man live to witness the misfortune of a friend. It is more merciful to despatch both at the same time. I don't think it would be a bad thing to polish off a few other friends also."

All turned their eyes towards Brutus to see what advice he would give on the matter.

"Antony is a bear," answered Brutus good-naturedly, "and when the lion falls the bear can't be of much danger."

"He is a troublesome fellow," rejoined Cassius, not being much convinced of the *bearship* of Antony. "Antony meddles so much with crowns that he deserves Cæsar's fate ; besides, the bear may turn a lion as did the young man of smooth face and neat dress. Better polish him off with Cæsar.

"A bowl of wine will make Antony soon forget Cæsar ; he is a man who loves soon and forgets soon."

"I would not trust much to the whims of an eccentric man like Mark Antony," replied Cassius with some uneasiness. "He may forget soon, he may not forget at all ; it is the uncertainty of the man that puzzles me, and in such critical moments as those nothing is so ruinous as uncertain characters, whether they are with or against us, because, with them, you cannot be prepared for all kinds of emergencies, and the whim of a moment might upset the plan of years. Let him be doomed. I would also doom a few other suspicious creatures like him. I would err on the safe side, and the bloody side is the safe one now."

"You are giving the poor simpleton an importance to which he has no claim. Let Cæsar be the only sufferer, and let Rome see that we struck only at the head of evil ; it gives more effect and less offence. What think you Lucilius ?"

"I think your plan is nobler, but Cassius's is safer," answered Lucilius smilingly.

"Well, then, let us take the nobler path; we prefer it to that of safety. If we sought safety we should not be taking our lives in our hands as we are doing. Let nobleness triumph over personal safety, and let none fall but Cæsar."

All acquiesced in Brutus's decision, but Cassius and Casca shrugged their shoulders and gave their consent in a half-hearted manner.

"Well, how shall we proceed to the business?" asked Casca impatiently.

"Somebody will try to engage Cæsar's attention," answered Cassius, "while the rest close round him, and when the ring has been made safe enough the assault will be signalled by the first blow, and the first blow must be dealt by—"

"By Casca," answered Casca himself, giving Cassius no time to finish.

"Well, let it be so," said Cassius, "though you deprive Cassius of an honour he had much coveted."

"But who is to engage Cæsar's attention?" asked Lucilius.

"This shall be done by your humble servant," chimed in Metellus. "Leave that to me, and I shall do it marvellously well."

The conspirators went on with their animated discussion arranging the details of the affair to an item, and to each was assigned a special duty after the murder should be committed.

The night was far spent when the patriotic conspirators settled their affairs and arranged their plan to their satisfaction. Then, wrapping their mantles round their bodies, and covering their faces with mufflers, they stole out from Brutus's house as cautiously as they came in.

Scarcely were they yet at the gate when a stranger, also wrapped in a mantle, and with his face muffled, suddenly made his appearance. The conspirators looked to one another in an inquisitive way. Cassius accosted him, but the stranger, without taking the slightest notice of him or his friends, glided through the gate and disappeared in the dark court.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE MORNING OF THE IDES OF MARCH.

THE grey dawn of the morning found Cæsar beside a heap of parchments, reading and writing with his usual precision and rapidity. The sun rose in the clear blue sky shedding his golden light upon the innumerable palaces and houses of the Immortal City. The far mountains looked grand, the trees threw their long shadows, and the birds warbled their morning hymn.

Unmindful of birds, trees, and hills Cæsar bent over the parchments before him, until his hand got tired of writing. Stepping out to the balcony, to have some fresh air, for a short while, he surveyed the view that presented itself to him with much satisfaction. Everything seemed to augur well for the day.

The sun was half-way to the meridian, when the Dictator, clothed with his magnificent uniform, entered his bedroom. Calphurnia was still in bed. She was sound asleep, peace and tranquillity were depicted on her features ; but his step, light as it was, awakened her.

“ Well, how do you feel now, after your sleep ? ”

“ I am much better and stronger,” replied the Princess, with a sweet smile, “ but, nevertheless, I feel still weak and bewildered.”

“ I come now to see you before going down to the Senate,” said Cæsar, walking forward to kiss her forehead. As he touched her hand, it felt like fire.

"You shall never go down to the Senate to-day," answered Calphurnia, with firm determination.

Seating himself on the sofa, he laid his elbow on the hilt of his sword and smiled.

"It must be done, darling. I have no choice in the matter."

"My sufferings last night were beyond description, Julius. It looked as if they were the voice of the gods. I have had many a dream in my life, but none like this; it seemed as if I had a divine warning, and to it I must listen."

"Your dream passed off with the humours of the night. Nature is now bright and beautiful outside."

"Nature is bright and beautiful outside, but my heart is gloomy and dark within. I shall never feel easy unless you stay by my side all day."

"I will not be long in the Senate, but I shall immediately be back," and having kissed her, he stepped towards the door.

Quick as an arrow the Princess stepped out from her bed, and, with her hair dishevelled, stood between him and the door.

"You will not go down to the Senate to-day—no—not as long as I live," and taking him by the hand she led him back to the sofa.

"But I have already sent word to the Senate, saying I was coming. I cannot break my word."

"I care not what you told the Senate, I care not what they may think; this day you shall not leave the palace."

Cæsar looked puzzled; he was hesitating whether to get angry or yield.

"You act like a distracted woman, Calphurnia."

"Say that I am distracted, say I am raving mad, say I am superstitious, but to-day you shall not leave your palace. For

heaven's sake, for my sake, for the sake of my love and devotion to you ; gratify my whim but this time, only this time, and when the Ides of March are gone do as you please." Leaning her head against his bosom, she burst into a torrent of tears, her jet hair falling against his face. "Give me your word," she continued, "you will not go, and I am the happiest woman on the face of the whole earth."

Still Cæsar could not yield. An air of determination was visible on his frowning brow.

Quitting his side, Calphurnia knelt on one knee before the sofa, and, taking his hand into hers, she covered it with kisses.

"It is *my* turn now to kneel and beg," said she, with her eyes still dropping tears; and she looked pathetically and appealingly into his face.

Who could refuse the entreaties of a noble woman, prostrated on her knees ?

"It is too much," thought Cæsar to himself. "I am a coward if I resist these tears and entreaties," and, clasping his arms round the head that lay buried on his bosom, he raised her to his side.

"For your sake," said he, "I will stay, though all the Senators of the world be offended."

A sigh of relief came out from the depth of her beating heart. "Thank you, Julius ; it is the greatest favour you have ever accorded me," and she tenderly hugged him. "I am all right now," added the Princess. "I shall get dressed in a minute, and we shall have a happy day."

With his sword still hanging on his side, Cæsar once more repaired to his study, and, taking a white parchment, he wrote the Senate that he was not coming. Shortly afterwards, Calphurnia, with her face radiant with joy, and her eyes bright

with happiness, joined him, and found him engaged in reading some of the documents before him.

"I shall act as your secretary, if it pleases you," she remarked, playfully.

"I take you at your word," replied the Dictator. "I wish all my secretaries were as fair and gentle. Here take a seat, and read me those documents while I finish my writing."

"And you could listen and write at the same time?"

Cæsar laughed. "You have never yet seen me engaged in active work, darling. I always have one secretary reading, two engaged in writing at my dictations, while I myself write my own messages; and when there are pressing State affairs I dictate to seven secretaries at the same time."

Calphurnia opened her eyes and wondered.

"My rank is not a bed of roses, I assure you. Many a time I sit up till the dawn of the morning, and even then my work is not finished. It is by the pen and the sword that I attained my greatness, and with pen and sword I will retain it. Here is the one, and here rests the other," and he pointed to the pen he held in his hand, and the sword that rested on his knee.

"May you never part with either of them!" the Princess replied, proudly. "And now to work. I must test your memory; you shall go on with your writing, and I with my reading, and then you shall recite what you have heard, and I read what you have written."

Half-an-hour passed, and both reading and writing were at an end.

"Well, you are anxious to know whether I digested the document you have been reading," and he then recited to her

all the essential points to an item, while he gave her the parchment on which he had been writing.

As the Princess was busy reading it, one of the servants came and announced a young nobleman, who was desirous of audience. It was Decimus Brutus, coming on behalf of the Senate.

"Well, Sir?" said Cæsar, as he met the young man in the sitting-room, extending to him his hand at the same time.

"I am requested by the Senate to beg your honour to come down to the sitting; all the members are there."

"But I have sent them word I was not coming."

"True, but you had already sent them word before that you were coming."

"Yes, but I have since made up my mind not to go. Tell them Cæsar won't come to-day," ended the Dictator, with a decided look on his face, which was quite familiar to all who approached him.

With a submissive air the young nobleman departed, reverentially saluting the Dictator as he withdrew.

"I have just sent the Senate another message I wasn't coming," said Cæsar as he rejoined Calphurnia.

"Oh! you cannot tell how grateful I am; you have made me happy to-day; I shall never forget this kindness. Is my office as a secretary to stop, or go on now?"

"People don't part with such fair secretaries so soon," replied Cæsar. "To work, madam; there is no zest in life, if there is no work in it. It is the panacea of all troubles. People would be much happier if they would only work a little more."

Once more the pen of the illustrious man scribbled on, and

the melodious voice of his secretary went on reading out documents to him.

It required only half-an-hour to mid-day when Cæsar, throwing a rapid glance at Calphurnia, perceived an expression of fatigue on her features.

“We shall have a few moments’ rest now,” said he. “Let us go to the balcony and have some fresh air.”

The effect of the night’s worry was still telling on the fair Princess; her face was pale, and her eyes had a sleepy and drooping look about them.

Arm in arm, the General and Princess walked out to the balcony. Rome glittered before their eyes in the sun like a fairy place. Never did the Immortal City look to Cæsar more magnificent and grand than she did now.

“Oh, how glorious Rome is to-day!” he cried, as they walked backward and forward. “It is a flattering sight to the man that rules her, but whose aim will always be to make her happy and prosperous.”

Scarcely had they been there five minutes when a few figures appeared at the great gate, and, crossing the court yard, they were directing their steps towards the palace. Neither of the occupants of the balcony appeared to notice them; they were both busy admiring the great city. Throwing a chance glance at the court yard, Calphurnia at last recognised the men.

A lioness deprived of her young could not have looked more fierce or ferocious than she did at that moment. Her dream, until now vague and indistinct before her, flashed upon her mind with startling clearness and detail. Throwing both arms above her head, like one suddenly coming across an object of terror, she gave a long shrill scream.

"There they are!" she screamed, her face pale as a sheet. "I see every one of the traitors, as I did in my dream. O, ye murderers and assassins! shame on me, if I let a single traitor of you enter the door of my palace!" She dashed out from the balcony in a frantic manner.

"What are you going to do?" asked Cæsar, quite beside himself, not knowing what to think or say.

"I am going down to close the door in their treacherous faces."

"Are you mad, Calphurnia?"

"Mad? By heaven, I have more in my brain than you could ever guess. Gang of assassins, that they are! It is now that I recollect my dream as clearly as I saw it. Oh! I cannot bear the look of them. The sight of blood still haunts me. Don't you see blood over there? I do—look, Cæsar, look! there is a pool of blood in yonder corner."

Cæsar looked, but saw nothing.

"The spell has taken hold of her once more," murmured he to himself. "Poor woman! it is very sad."

"Stir not from your place," cried the Princess, wild with fury, "leave everything to me, and all shall be well yet." She then hurried towards the flight of steps leading to the ground floor, when Cæsar stood right in her way.

"You know not what you are doing; you insult my best friends in my palace."

"Your best friends? Your mortal enemies, my lord! They come, just as I saw them in my dream; traitors and cowards they are, everyone of them!"

"How can you speak thus, Calphurnia? See you not Brutus among them?"

"He is the most mortal enemy of all, that treacherous

Brutus. It is he who dealt thee the last fatal stab!" and, once more, she walked towards the steps.

"You are unwell, Calphurnia. You had better rest in bed." Sorrowfully he took her in his strong arms, and gently carried her to bed—the same one on which she saw her dreadful dream the night before.

She was exhausted, and lay like one paralyzed. Her wet eyes were turned compassionately towards her illustrious husband. He bent his face over hers and passionately impressed a kiss on her lips. As he reached the door, Cæsar stood for a moment and looked back at her; their eyes met in silent, but mutual, love and sympathy. With his eyes drooping, and his face saddened, Cæsar stepped out from his wife's presence, and, as he did so, her soul welled out in love and pity.

The visitors were already in the State saloon. They were a good number, these loving and devoted friends of Cæsar. Only Brutus lagged a little behind, and both he and Cæsar met in the corridor leading to the saloon. The latter ran forward and embraced Brutus, as tenderly as an affectionate father, hugging him to his heart. Brutus returned the compliment, and, as he did so, a faint blush tinged his cheeks.

"I haven't seen you for an age, my dear son," said Cæsar.

For an instant there was wavering and irresolution on Brutus' features. He felt he could kneel before his benefactor, and confess all to him.

"I have news that will gladden your heart," continued the Dictator, "but you shall know it later on." Cæsar's intimation was not only concerning the high promotion he meant to confer on him that day, but also his decision regarding Cleopatra. If Cæsar had but only spoke that word it would have settled the

wavering of Brutus, and changed the destiny of his friend. But it is these delays which make the history of the world.

Followed by Brutus, Cæsar stepped into the saloon, and, as he did so, all the dignitaries and high officials that were there reverentially rose up like one man. The sallow face of Cassius and the pale countenance of Casca came in full view, while Trebonius, Ligarius, Decimus Brutus, Metellus Cimber, Lucilius, Titinius, Cinna, Volumnius, Cato, Messala, and several other senators and officers were grouped in the centre.

"Well," began Cæsar, half in irony, half in earnest, "I feel much gratified to have the pleasure of your company, gentlemen."

"It is to have the pleasure of noble Cæsar's company in the Senate," answered Cassius, his face getting more sallow than usual.

"But, gentlemen," answered the Dictator smiling in an indifferent manner, "I have twice sent word that I was not coming."

"It is at your honour's intimation that the Senate assembled to-day, and is still waiting with impatience," replied Casca, with a slight trembling in his voice.

"In that case," replied Cæsar, "they need not wait, for I shall not come."

"What answer shall we give to those that sent us? Shall we say that great Cæsar is unwell?"

"Cæsar sends no lies to the Senate."

"Shall we tell them he has more pressing business to attend to?"

"Neither does Cæsar shield his will by false pretexts. Calphurnia had a dreadful dream last night; my going to the Senate frightens her to death."

For the first time the visitors exchanged a look of surprise and fear; Brutus opened his eyes wide. It was the strange news that Cæsar had given up going down to the Senate for the sake of Calphurnia. What claim had Calphurnia on him when she was to be divorced that day and replaced by Egypt's Queen?

"Then shall we say," continued Casca, "that brave Cæsar does not come to the Senate because he fears coming?"

"Cæsar neither lies nor fears, rash man. Say the plain simple truth. Cæsar won't come because he won't come."

The silence that ensued was oppressive. None dared to parley any further, for they all knew to whom they were talking.

Only one man had the privilege of speaking in such moments, and he made use of that privilege.

"Noble Cæsar," began Marcus Brutus, "shall we go back with such an answer to the Senate in whose hands is the crown which is shortly to rest on your royal head? What would they say when they know that in order not to disappoint Calphurnia *once*, they were disappointed *thrice*?"

At the word of crown the Dictator hesitated. He looked grave, and seemed in deep reflection. But his decision was rapid as usual.

"It cannot be, my dear Brutus. I said I was not coming to the Senate, and to the Senate I shall not come."

All knew what Cæsar's decision meant; all were familiar with his firmness. The conspirators looked at one another in helplessness and despair.

At this unlucky moment there was one among the number of the visitors who was as beloved of Cæsar as Brutus was, He was no conspirator, but with honest feelings and convictions,

not having a ghost of an idea of their wicked intentions, he had accompanied them thither to press the Dictator for his own sake and interest to come down as was first arranged. Brutus looked into this visitor's face; it was his last hope, and to it he resorted.

Mark Antony changed the history of the world more than once, but this certainly was the first time he unconsciously did so on a grand scale. He had unbounded love for Cæsar. He firmly believed that Cæsar's refusal to comply with the wish of the Senate might be injurious to his cause, and that if exasperated the Senators might withdraw the offer of the crown. Determined not to let it slip now from Cæsar's hands as it did last time, he resolved to take advantage of the promise Cæsar once made him upon his honour to comply with any request of Antony's unless he asked something beyond human possibility. Accordingly, Antony bent his head over the Dictator's ears and spoke in a whisper. Nobody knew what he spoke, but they noticed the Dictator looked embarrassed. For a moment he hesitated as he rarely did before in his life. But, to the joy of all present, signs of relenting were apparent in his face. The frown passed off his brow and he even faintly smiled.

"It is both unkind and unchivalrous of you, Mark, to insist upon it in such a time, but Cæsar's honour was pledged, and Cæsar's honour must be redeemed. Gentlemen," continued Cæsar, to the dignitaries before him, "I will come down to the Senate. Get ready to accompany me."

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE NOON OF THE IDES OF MARCH.

THE sun was at his zenith when great Cæsar was ready for the Senate. His horse was already saddled for him, and the noble animal, at the sight of his master, pricked his ears, and proudly looked round with his two powerful eyes. Cæsar offered him his hand and the animal licked it with his tongue, and then neighed, lifting up his magnificent head and shaggy mane towards the sky.

Beside the noble horse stood a big shaggy dog which was a constant companion to his master. This animal acted differently. The moment he saw Cassius and Casca near his master's person he became fierce and rushed at them with such violence that if it had not been for Cæsar's scolding he might have torn them to pieces. At Brutus he howled fiercely and would not stop even when admonished by his master.

"Has any of you, gentlemen, done any harm to this dog?" asked the Dictator with something like surprise. "He behaves this morning as he never did before."

"Not in the least," answered Brutus.

"He is a very sagacious creature, Brutus, I got him as a present from one of the influential chiefs when I was in Gallia. The noble animal was not with me a week when he saved my life. For a long half-hour he kept howling at somebody, and would listen to no scolding; my servant suspected the man; he was accordingly searched, and would you believe it, Brutus? the dagger that was to have pierced my heart was hidden in his bosom!"

Brutus turned deathly pale.

"I shouldn't care to keep beside him," said the latter trying to look indifferent, "if he is so dangerous."

"I have half a mind to take him down with me," remarked Cæsar seriously.

"Has Cæsar's dog also a place in the Senate?" asked Cassius, jestingly.

"You are turning a great wit, Cassius."

"Well, one has to turn one thing or other," said Casca.

Just as everything was ready for the start, and all the retinue had assembled in the courtyard, a voice, a strange trembling voice, came as if on the wings of wind.

"Cæsar, beware of the *Ides of March*!"

How or whence this voice came from nobody could tell, but it sounded so distinctly that all startled at hearing it. Cæsar, mounted on his steed, looked round and winced. All were silent and preoccupied.

"It is a strange day, this *Ides of March*," remarked the Dictator in his pleasant, careless manner. "But, gentlemen, we must proceed now."

Like an orb surrounded by its satellites, so did Cæsar appear surrounded by the dignitaries of Rome as he moved, mounted on his noble steed, with a ring of those nobles around him. His uniform, fringed with gold and silver and studded with precious stones, glittered in the rays of the sun. His noble features appeared at their best, and his eagle eyes surveyed the surroundings with unusual keenness. Reaching the iron gate, he threw a lingering look towards the immense building, and then, spurring the sides of his steed, he quitted the Dictatorial Palace—for ever!

All Rome was astir. The streets were crowded with people.

There was not a single frowning face. Rome grudged not adorning the head of Cæsar with a crown. The enthusiasm he created in refusing the previous one offered him was overwhelming. He would not hear of being crowned a King over the Romans, so they were going to crown him King over the Parthians, and this offended nobody.

The road on both sides was lined with people, who were eager to do homage to the greatest man Rome ever produced. Girls with beautiful bouquets of flowers in their hands sprinkled them on the head of the kindest ruler who ever wielded power in the Capitol. Women, with their infants in their arms, held them high up in the air to take a look at the benefactor of the people; aged men on the brink of the grave staggered along on their crutches to see the most illustrious man of their country before they were carried away by death. The windows were crammed with heads looking down with eager anxiety to have a glimpse of the noble form that passed below them surrounded with the noblest of the Romans. Wild shouts of joy and enthusiasm burst forth from the groups of citizens, one crowd after another, as he came in full view.

“Long live the father of his country! Long live the defender of the Capitol! Glory and honour to the Victor! Love and reverence to the Benefactor! Long live illustrious Cæsar! Long live great Cæsar!” burst out from different parts of the immense multitude.

Cæsar gazed on the crowds as he passed by, and the devotion and respect lavished on him from all quarters brought tears of joy to his black eyes. With affection that sprang from the depth of his heart, he saluted them so kindly and lovingly that had it not been for the guards that sur-

rounded him like an impenetrable wall, the people would at once have rushed forward and carried him on their arms, as they had done on several previous occasions.

Turning to Mark Antony, who was riding close by his side, Cæsar smiled.

“Mark you, Antony,” said he, “these tokens of love and attachment which my dear children lavish on their father? I have won many a battle, and conquered many a nation, but none of all my previous achievements gave me such a thrill of pleasure as does the present occasion. My previous victories were against arms and brutal strength; my present one is over the heart and feeling. I shall be the meanest coward in the world if I abuse this confidence, or turn a traitor against these loving hearts. They are my children, and if I do not treat them as a father I am the basest of all traitors!”

“The Romans know in what beneficence and generosity they have put their trust, and they will abide by it,” answered Antony.

“Mark Antony, I have a secret to tell thee. Last night brought a wonderful change over me; I gave up being wedded to that fascinating, cruel Queen. Calphurnia must ever remain my beloved and honoured wife. Cæsarion I shall adopt, and he must be entrusted to thy care. No cruel man, but, above all things, no cruel woman, should rule Rome. Nothing but justice and liberty, kindness and benevolence, should reign here. I must leave behind me an eternal and glorious name, which must be cherished and loved after my death as well as during my life. We never know when death may cut us down. Divine as many take me to be, no one more than myself feels the weakness of the mortal. I

must always be good and kind, for this is the path to true greatness."

"This is good news for Brutus," cried Antony in his simple honest way. "Though he might have never mentioned the affair to you, he always felt aggrieved at the alliance with the Egyptian witch. I wonder how it was possible for great Cæsar to contract such a ruinous attachment."

You wonder, Mark Antony, how it was possible for Cæsar to contract such an alliance? This witch shall be the ruin and destruction of a man who, otherwise, might have been another Cæsar!

"Brutus shall know about it anon," answered the Dictator hurriedly. "I shall make him acquainted with the glad news as soon as the Senate is adjourned; I have already informed him I have glad tidings for him."

At that moment a man, pushing his way through the press, was seen rushing in great hurry to reach the great man. The guards were roughly handling him for his intrusion, when Cæsar happened to look in that direction.

"What is the matter?" he enquired.

"A man with a petition," answered one of the guards. "He will have it delivered into Cæsar's own hands."

"It is a day of joy. I shall have none disappointed. Let him deliver his petition direct."

At once the guards made way. An elderly man, clothed in long robes, advanced forward.

"For heaven's sake read this little parchment, noble Cæsar," cried the man with much agitation.

"Man," answered the Dictator, "you shall have your request granted whatever it may be. If any wrong befell you, justice will redress it. If you are in poverty, you shall be

rich. If in distress, it shall be relieved. It is a day of rejoicing to all, and all must be happy to-day."

"Noble Dictator," answered Artemidorus, "what is in that parchment concerns great Cæsar, and great Cæsar alone. It is pressing—as pressing as it is possible to be."

"What is your profession, man?"

"An astrologer, noble sir."

"And what have the stars to do with Cæsar?"

"They shed their faint, but pure, light upon the dark night so that Cæsar may see what is in the dark before him."

"There is plenty of time to read before the night comes," answered Cæsar good-naturedly.

"To-day is the Ides of March!" replied the astrologer.

"Well, what of that?"

"In the Ides of March, continued Artemidorus, "there will be a great eclipse of the sun; the sun of Rome, too, shall be eclipsed while you sit in the Senate. See you not that dagger of cloud threatening the sun?"

In fact, a piece of dark cloud extended like a dagger towards the sun as if it was about to plunge in his heart.

"Well," went on the astrologer, "you are the sun of Rome, and this parchment will inform you how to avoid the dagger that threatens you. *Now* there is time; in the *Senate* it will be *too late*!"

"Antony," said Cæsar, "give this man a handful of gold. This is what he is after, I believe," and so saying he spurred his horse once more. A minute later he was at the door of the Senate.

The instant Cæsar appeared in the great hall of the Senate House, the Senators respectfully rose to their feet and saluted

their head. Cæsar returned their salutation with great kindness, taking his seat in his usual place. His so-called devoted and intimate friends ranged themselves close to Cæsar's seat while the innocent and loyal were at a distance.

Sitting in his seat, Cæsar gazed round the hall, and every cowardly traitor there quailed under the piercing, lionlike eyes. Cæsar was no simpleton. He clearly understood what the astrologer was after. Long before that he had already heard many vague rumours concerning conspiracies and plots against his life; but his great and noble soul scorned to listen to them. Once pressed by an intimate friend who was relating to him trustworthy evidences regarding a dark plot, he proudly answered, "I would rather die than live under the fear of being murdered." Such a life was not worth living to Cæsar. His greatness was a real one; it was neither superficial nor false. His feelings and actions were based upon solid principles and solid truths.

Ambitious he certainly was. No great man worthy of greatness ever rose in the world without ambition, and none shall ever rise without it. It is the very life of greatness. That overgrown monster, the Republic, was tottering to the ground. The noble public feeling that supported and nourished the old institution was gone, and gone for ever. The decline of the Roman Empire must be dated from the time of Cæsar. Rome required an able man—Dictator, King, Emperor, Consul for life—call him whatever you like—somebody to direct the helm of that huge but rotten ship; and the only competent man who could have done that to the glory and honour of Rome was Julius Cæsar.

All eyes in the Senate turned towards the man of Rome. All looked to see how Cæsar looked; all listened to hear what

Cæsar said; he was the very life and soul of that great institution.

Pale and trembling the cowards shook under his penetrating and steady gaze. He turned his eyes upon Brutus, but he could not bear them. Shaking with fear, Brutus cast his eyes upon the ground where he ought to have prostrated himself before his benefactor, and, on his knees, asked forgiveness for his infamous ingratitude.

Before Cæsar lay a brass plate covered with wax, and on this he was engaged writing with a metallic pen. Rapidly did the pen move between his fingers, nobody wondered; it would not have been Cæsar if it were otherwise.

At this favourable opportunity a man, muffled and wrapped with a mantle round his body, under which was hid a sword, marched into the Senate Hall. Nobody paid any attention to him. Many envoys of different nationalities, especially from Parthia, were expected to plead their cause that day. Further, the muffled man was surrounded by some of the most influential dignitaries in the Senate House.

By this time Cæsar had finished two orders on the wax-plated metal; one of which raised Brutus to the highest office possible in the State next to Cæsar; the other appointed Cassius Governor of Syria.

Presently, Metellus Cimber crawled forward and stood before the Dictator. The latter, without knowing who was before him, went on writing. This time it was a proclamation of pardon to Sextus Pompey, with a generous offer to have a share in the government of Rome to compensate for the losses he had sustained.

"Well, Cimber?" asked Cæsar, raising his eyes as he finished engraving his order on the soft wax.

"I come to beg, noble Cæsar, for a favour," answered the man with a tremulous voice, which Cæsar mistook for timidity.

"Speak, my dear Metellus, but remember we are in the House of Justice, and what is asked in the Senate must be within its bounds."

"May it please great Cæsar to repeal the order that deprived my brother of his country, and sent him to banishment?"

"My dear Metellus, your brother committed a grave crime against the State. You know too well that his crime deserved a greater punishment, but mercy took the place of justice, and banishment that of execution."

"However great the crime of my brother has been, the generosity of Cæsar is greater."

"I am but the servant of the State, good friend, and as such I cannot betray the trust that Rome has placed in my honour. Public safety and public justice require your brother to remain meanwhile in banishment. I am sorry it cannot be otherwise."

"I beg great Cæsar to reflect a little more over the case before giving his final decision."

Cæsar looked with astonishment into the face of the speaker. On any other occasion, almost imperceptible as the impertinence of the speaker was, it could never have been tolerated, but on that day he could afford to overlook it.

The conspirators came a little nearer round the Dictator.

"Once more I have considered your request," Cæsar answered, after a short pause, "and once more I am sorry to repeat that your brother must remain in banishment. But

who is that muffled man, yonder?" asked the Dictator abruptly, from those around him, the moment his eyes caught the strange sight.

"He is a Parthian envoy," replied Cassius.

"I shall attend to him presently," answered Cæsar.

"The love of a brother knows no refusal," went on Metellus.

"I shall beg until I obtain."

The blood mounted into Cæsar's face; while his eyes glistened with rage.

"Metellus Cimber, Metellus Cimber," thundered Cæsar, "my kindness seems only to have stimulated your rashness and impertinence."

"A Roman citizen is speaking to you, my lord, and as such he expects to be treated."

The conspirators narrowed their ring and pressed all the more closely round the Dictator's person.

"Know how you behave yourself in the presence of Julius Cæsar, Metellus. My kindness infatuates you, let not my wrath consume you."

"On my knees I once more beseech you to repeal the order of banishment. I shall not quit your presence until I obtain my object," and Metellus Cimber bent his knee before Cæsar.

"Supplications ought never to frustrate justice; your brother shall not come back from banishment; and if you remain an age before me I tell you that he will not be allowed to return, and now no more of this—Parthian envoy, forward," ended he, directing his eyes towards the curiously-dressed stranger. But Cimber still knelt before him.

"Noble Cæsar," began Cassius, "have mercy upon him."

"Generous Cæsar," joined in Casca, "refuse him not this favour."

Cæsar went on with his writing on the tablet, and Cimber still knelt.

The angry spot appeared in Cæsar's forehead, and all knew what it meant.

"Will you leave the Senate Hall?" replied Cæsar, with a voice of wrath that sounded like thunder.

All the Senators who were engaged in different affairs were startled at the severity with which Cæsar spoke, and all turned round to see who and what angered the great man.

Cassius drew much closer now.

"Grant him his request, noble Cæsar," he said.

"Have mercy, magnanimous Cæsar," joined Casca.

"Well! well!" answered the Dictator, beside himself with rage and fury. "If you leave not Cæsar then he must leave you," and he rose to quit the hall.

Quick as an arrow Casca drew the treacherous dagger from his bosom and struck at Cæsar's neck.

The Dictator, in the twinkling of an eye, saw the meaning of the whole business. His features were terrible with wrath, and the fire that darted out from his eyes appalled all around him. A lion could not look more terrible or fierce.

The other Senators, possessed by panic, fled in crowds towards the entrance door, trampling each other in their hurry, until the hall was left in possession of a brave man among a gang of treacherous cowards.

Rapid as lightning Cæsar brought his hand to the pommel of his sword, which he instantly drew. So intense was the fire that kindled his eyes, and so terrifying were his looks, that something like temporary paralysis took possession of the conspirators, who, with nerveless limbs, stood still, daring to do nothing, daring to say nothing.

At this critical moment the Parthian envoy stepped forward. Throwing his mantle aside, and tearing off the muffle that had hidden his face, he stood a picture of resolution and determination.

"The blood of my father," cried he, "the blood of my mother, the blood of my brother, all—all cry for vengeance and revenge, and vengeance and revenge I shall have!" and with his drawn sword he advanced.

Cæsar looked hard into his face, and to his extreme surprise, recognised in him Sextus Pompey!

"You shall not be taken unawares, Julius Cæsar," thundered the voice of Sextus once more. "With your sword in hand fight for your life; there is no room for both of us in the bounds of the world; and one of us must perish."

"Guard yourself, and that quickly," replied Cæsar.

The crowd of conspirators around them silently made room for the mortal combat. Not leaving him breathing time, Cæsar rushed at Sextus, and with the first round he wounded him in the forehead, while he himself escaped unhurt.

Once more the combatants closed in with desperate determination. The swords clashed against each other. The struggle was terrible. Sextus received another wound on the upper part of the chest, while he inflicted a severe one on the left side of Cæsar's shoulder. Neither of them took breath; neither felt anything save a prick in the body, and in mortal strife they kept up their struggle. Cæsar fought with the recklessness and intrepidity which despair alone can inspire. So hotly did he press Sextus that the latter, retreating, came against one of the seats, and by an unfortunate accident stumbled and fell to the ground, Cæsar's sword almost touching his throat.

"I ask mercy from no man," said Sextus, with a clear, determined voice.

"And I," answered Cæsar with dignity, "I never committed cowardice in my life. I cannot butcher a man like a sheep. Rise Sextus, our combat must be ended as becomes men of honour." Respectfully saluting him, the Dictator stepped backward with the point of his sword down towards the ground.

An instant later and Sextus once more regained his former attitude. Returning Cæsar's salutation, he now put himself on the offensive.

For the third time the combatants rushed at each other with so much force that the swords trembled in their hands like reeds. Cæsar, loosing patience, rushed at him with fury, making a terrible thrust that, if it had not been dexterously avoided, would certainly have pierced his adversary through. Sextus, jerking suddenly to one side, Cæsar's sword barely touched his opponent's shoulder, and violently striking the wall, it shivered to pieces. The Dictator was now completely at the mercy of Sextus.

A murmur of applause came out from the ring of conspirators.

"Now run him through!" cried the cowards, as Cæsar stood defenceless; "now is the time for revenge!"

Chivalrous Sextus did not move; but, to the disappointment and utter consternation of everybody, instead of plunging his sword into his adversary's heart, he raised the weapon, and saluting the General with much respect, he plunged it back into its scabbard and stood still with his arm leaning against the statue of his father.

"You have taken revenge as becomes the son of noble

Pompey," said Cæsar ; and, bending the knee to the statue of Pompey, before which the combat had been going on all this time, he laid the stump of his sword at its feet, saluting it with much chivalry and courtesy.

Two big tears rolled down the sunburnt face of Sextus as he quitted the scene.

"By the gods, this is too much!" remarked Cassius to Casca. "Sextus Pompey will soon side with the Tyrant. I cannot trust even my own self after this. Quick! Don't you hear the tremendous crash against the doors? Antony will soon be back with the guards, and then all will be lost!" So saying, he rushed forward, and coming behind Cæsar, thrust his sword into his back.

Like a lion hotly pressed in the chase, Cæsar threw himself at the traitor, and by sheer force wrenched the sword from his assailant's hand, dealing him at the same time a blow with his clenched fist which sent him rolling and yelling like a dog to the ground.

Higher and higher sounded the blows of the guards against the doors of the Senate Hall. Their battle axes hacked the wooden material, which shivered and splintered under their powerful blows. The startled cowardly conspirators heard the sounds. They were like strokes from the hand of Fate.

Crash! crash! crash! came the repeated sounds of the axes. The first door was hewn to pieces. The second had yielded. Now they were at the last and third door. Turning towards this door Cæsar, covered with wounds, cut his way, hurling aside everybody that came across his fatal path. Another minute, and he would have been rescued and saved.

Suddenly, at that supreme moment, Brutus, who had been

invisible all along, rushed violently forward with a glittering dagger in his hand, and stood between Cæsar and the door. The eyes of the Dictator blazed at that most treacherous of all traitors, and for an instant he doubted his own sight, and began to think that he really was in a dream. But the eyes of the traitor looked right into those of Cæsar with unparalleled audacity, and dispelled all doubt. It was really his dear Brutus, his beloved Brutus, his best friend in the world. It was a terrible and heartrending moment in Cæsar's life ! Pen can never describe the agony and mortification that crushed his very being.

Cæsar struggled no more. Life was no longer worth living. Like a mesmerised man fixed to the spot on which he was standing, the Dictator gazed at the traitor before him, whom he had always called his son. There was neither hatred nor malice, nor anger in that magnetising look. Even *then* it was a look of *love* and *compassion* ! A sweet, sad, sad smile gave his features a sublime expression, while from his gentle lips dropped the laconic words which will remain inscribed in the pages of history for ever :

“ Et Tu Brute ! ”

Flinging his sword from his hand, Cæsar covered his face with the folds of his mantle, while Brutus plunged his dagger in the Dictator's side up to the hilt.

Without a single groan, or syllable, staggering and reeling, the Dictator fell down upon the ground quite close to the spot where the statue of Pompey stood. A gentle sigh, like the breath of a mild summer zephyr, escaped his heaving bosom, and the struggle of life was over. Cæsar the Great was dying ! Cæsar the Great was dead !!

CHAPTER XLV.

THE EVENING OF THE IDES OF MARCH.

JUST at that moment Antony, breathless and agitated, surrounded by the loyal guards, rushed into the Senate Hall. He was only one minute too late. Before him, at the foot of Pompey's statue, lay a lifeless corpse, the remains of a man who, only a few moments ago, could, with a single word, have thrown the whole world into terror and consternation.

Antony, dumb and horrified, stood before the lifeless figure, scarcely realising that before him lay the dear friend who, but a minute ago, was all life and grandeur.

The guards, in their first impulse, brought their hands to the handles of their swords to strike, but, puzzled and confused, they halted in the very act. For the sake of whom were they to draw their weapons? In the cause of whom were they to shed Roman blood. The greatness of Cæsar departed with him. If they drew their swords, it was in the cause of living greatness. Antony had hitherto been only the shadow of Cæsar, but people do not strike for the sake of shadows. It is for objects that throw shadows that people would like to risk something. Antony was called by the conspirators "the bear." He was spared, because he was not deemed of sufficient importance to be murdered.

With all his treachery and ingratitude, Brutus was the only man present in that imposing hall fit to be the head of a new political movement. He must be conceded this much,

that, unlike all the rest of the conspirators, his actions were not prompted by sordid jealousy or criminal ambition. It was a *false sense of true patriotism* that turned him a traitor against his benefactor, when he thought the latter was faithless to his country. His course was, in fact, ruinous to both.

At this critical moment Brutus, with the confidence that sincerity always inspires, raised his voice, and all recognised in him at once the future head of the State—all, except Cassius, who now looked upon himself already as a dictator.

“Noble citizens,” said Brutus. “Before us lies the tyrant of his country. Rome is once more free! We must declare the glad tidings to the citizens, and render an account for the bloody deed we have just done.”

So saying, he plunged his dagger again into the lifeless corpse, and, tucking up his sleeves, besmeared both arms with the noblest blood Rome ever produced. The rest followed his example.

There was no shadow of a doubt that Brutus became now the master of the situation, and the position of Antony changed at once from a master into that of a prisoner.

“Mark Antony,” said Brutus, taking him aside by the arm. “It was to return to Rome freedom and liberty that the fatal blow was dealt. Rome can never suffer the dominion of a wicked Egyptian Queen who aspires to be a Roman Empress, persuing her infernal games here as she did in Alexandria. The wedding day of that unspeakable woman is now turned into a funeral.”

“What says noble Brutus?” asked Antony.

“I say,” replied the former, “I cannot bear that cruel Cleopatra Ptolemy should sit on a Roman throne.”

“You have misjudged Cæsar, as well as murdered him.”

“What mean you, Antony?”

“I mean that from yester night Cæsar gave up his projected alliance with Cleopatra. His sole object was to further the happiness of his compatriots.”

“You are trying to shield the memory of Cæsar, Antony.”

“It is but the simple truth.”

“What evidence have you?”

“Cæsar’s own word.”

“Upon the honour of an Antony?”

“Upon the honour of an Antony.”

“When did he communicate this piece of news?”

“This morning, on our way to the Senate. I happened to be beside him, and he was communicative.”

“Would Cæsar inform Antony what he hides from Brutus?”

“No; but he told me he meant to break the news to you after the Senate should have adjourned. He informed me, further, that he had already hinted to you that he had tidings to communicate which would gladden your heart.”

Like a man striving to remember something, Brutus brought the palm of his right hand to his forehead.

“Oh, unfortunate man that I am!” cried he in a frantic way. “If that is the truth, I shall never forgive myself the fatal blunder I made; it will haunt me all my life—I would willingly give up my life to undo what I did.” Sinking into a seat close by, he doubled himself up with tears in his eyes.

“Antony,” repeated Brutus once more—“the deed is done; we have already decided to grant Cæsar an oration and public funeral. Upon you falls that task, and you must eulogise him as becomes his high rank.”

“I am not a man of words,” replied Antony. “It is more befitting that *you* should take charge of the oration.”

"I am fit for nothing now, but I must justify my conduct on the Forum. Take good care of the noble corpse that lies there," and with a face as pale as the lifeless mass before Pompey's statue, he burst from the hall tarnished and besmeared with blood. His comrades followed.

Alone, and sick at heart, Antony was left with the remains of Cæsar. The moment they were all gone, he directed his steps mournfully towards the corpse. Respectfully kneeling before it, he covered his eyes with his hands, and shed a torrent of tears.

"Before the sun of this day sets," vowed Antony, as he bent over the remains of the warrior, "I shall wreak vengeance upon these treacherous cowards, or join thee in death!" Then, drying his tears, he rose to his feet with resolute determination.

Meanwhile the scene that was taking place outside baffled description. A number of treacherous Senators, to the number of fifty or sixty, were out in the streets of the city bareheaded, covered with blood, and their daggers in their hands red and wet.

"Death to the Traitor! Death to the Tyrant! Liberty to Rome! Freedom to the Capitol!" sounded everywhere in the ears of the startled citizens. Men flew about in confusion. Like frantic creatures they staggered about. Some people flying away with the terrible news; others were rushing in to hear the shouts of the Senators. The shops closed; the squares of the Capitol were crowded with citizens; women, with fright depicted on their ghastly faces, mixed with the crowds. The sounds of the trumpets were heard above the disorder. Some men screamed, some smiled, some frowned, others shed

tears, some shouted with joy, others speechless and silent, were unable to move, until the whole city became a bedlam.

The sun, like a sombre disc, frowned behind the black clouds at Rome and the Romans, and then vanished like an angry god. The heaven looked like a vault of red-hot iron. As the sunlight faded, it left behind it, dull leaden clouds, streaked with red-like swords of fire, with points threatening the Capitol. The multitude, always superstitious in those times, looked at the sky and trembled.

The bewildered Romans began to pour into the Forum. Signs of a great catastrophe could be read in every face. It was clear that the greatest calamity that could have occurred to Rome had just taken place. The only man who had been at the helm of the rotten ship had been murdered, and both ship and sailors might sink into a terrible abyss.

Inside the Forum the multitudes jammed against each other and growled like wild beasts, while tens of thousands were outside tossing and roaring like a mighty sea.

One desire was common to all, and that was to tear the murderers to pieces, and throw their carcasses to the dogs. Roar and yell as you may, angry Romans, you are but dolls in the hands of the orators that are just getting ready to appear on the stage! Your national character had long since ceased to exist. The illustrious man who was trying to infuse life into the puppet was dead, and nothing remained but the puppet without life.

Suddenly the curtain of the stage was lifted up. On the platform a man, brandishing a blood-stained dagger in his hand, his arms bare and besmeared with blood, his clothes spotted and clotted, stood with flaming eyes and ghastly

features. It was Marcus Brutus, the son of Cæsar ! the dearly beloved friend of Cæsar ! the ruthless murderer of Cæsar !

With fearless determination he surveyed the crowds with blood-shot eyes. Under that bold look of his there was deep grief gnawing at his heart. Nevertheless, there were bold hints of greatness about him. It was the most supreme moment in his life, and he rose to its level.

At this strange sight, groans, murmurs, and roars vanished in a moment. Not a single word was uttered. Everything was hushed and expectant. All eyes turned towards the virtuous murderer. Like a man facing his very fate, with undaunted courage, Brutus stood before them. Murderer as he was, it must be confessed that nothing but truth could have sustained his courage at this sublime moment. Of all the band of traitors he was the only one who acted according to the dictations of his conscience. The rest were vile murderers and cowards, and they dared not face their judges. The only man in whom there was honesty of purpose rose up to shield them. The bold appearance of a public man before such an excited crowd often creates enthusiasm and sympathy before he opens his lips. It was so now. In a moment their angry looks, their wild eyes softened, and in their ears rang the clear sharp voice of the man who stood before them to plead his cause, and turn murder into virtue.

“ Be patient till the last,” began Marcus Brutus.

“ Romans, countrymen, and lovers ! hear me for my cause ; and be silent, that you may hear. Believe me for mine honour ; and have respect to mine honour, that you may believe. Censure me in your wisdom ; and awake your senses, that you may the better judge. If there be any in this assembly, any dear friend of Cæsar’s, to him I say that

Brutus's love to Cæsar was no less than his. If, then, that friend demand why Brutus rose against Cæsar, this is my answer—not that I loved Cæsar less, but that I loved Rome more. Had you rather Cæsar were living, and die all slaves; than that Cæsar were dead, and you lived freemen? As Cæsar loved me, I weep for him; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I honour him; but, as he was ambitious, I slew him. There are tears, for his love; joy, for his fortune; honour, for his valour; and death for his ambition. Who is here so base as would be a bondman? If any, speak; for him have I offended. Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman? If any, speak; for him have I offended. Who is here so vile that will not love his country? If any, speak, for him have I offended. I pause for a reply."

"None, Brutus, none," cried the enthusiastic multitude.

"Then," resumed the orator, "none have I offended. I have done no more to Cæsar than you shall do to Brutus. The question of his death is enrolled in the Capitol; his glory not extenuated, wherein he was worthy; nor his offences enforced for which he suffered death."

"Here comes his body," continued the orator, as he perceived the corpse brought near a little side door, and placed there until he finished his oration. "Here comes his body, mourned by Mark Antony, who, though he had no hand in his death, shall receive the benefit of his dying, a place in the commonwealth, as which of you shall not? With this I depart. I slew my best love for the good of Rome; I have the same dagger for myself when it shall please my country to need my death."

As the spiral rings of a watch spring unwind, one after the other, with a key, so acted the words of the orator. By the

time he came to the end of his oration, bursts of cheers took the place of the threatening gestures, and anger was lost in admiration.

"Live, Brutus! live, great Brutus!" was shouted in all directions.

"We are saved now!" whispered Cassius, with his sallow face turned toward the fox-like visage of Casca. "But for our dear Brutus, we should have been torn to pieces by this time."

"The tide is in our favour," replied his friend.

"I shall be a Dictator yet," mused Cassius to himself. "The back of Brutus serves as an excellent ladder to that ambitious post."

Towards the platform rushed the crowds to carry the speaker home on their arms, but instantly Brutus lifted up his hand in an authoritative manner, as if to command silence and repress enthusiasm.

"We have accorded," said he, "the corpse an oration and a funeral. Mark Antony is entrusted with the performance of the last honour to the dead. Stir not from your places. He is already here, and will presently come before you; to him you will listen." Quitting the stage, Brutus marched out at the head of the conspirators, amidst the deafening shouts of the populace, repeated again and again.

"You have committed a grave mistake, Brutus," said the cunning, but wise, Casca, when they were in the street. "These Romans are unstable and fickle, and who knows that Antony may not turn the tide of feeling in his favour?"

"Antony is a bear," answered Cassius, smilingly. "It is not much to Cæsar's honour that he should be eulogised by such a clumsy animal."

"In any case," answered Brutus, "it is a duty we owe to

the memory of Cæsar, and it must be done." Then, musing to himself, "this grave error might have been averted if Cæsar had but spoken one word. That word *was* spoken, but to the wrong man; anyhow, grief amends no mistakes." Silently he walked homeward.

Scarcely had the assassins left the Forum, when four slaves, clothed in black, entered the space with a nobly apparelled litter on their shoulders. In the litter were the remains of the man who, in the morning, was the absolute ruler of Rome. Before them walked a stalwart man, with wet eyes, and grief at his heart.

Slowly, but firmly, they mounted the stage, and laid the litter, all covered with black drapery, on the platform. Not a single murmur escaped the lips of the multitude. The puppet was unwound, and it had to be wound up again. The clumsy Antony had to do the neat work of the watchmaker—a most difficult task for him. But, if physiognomy were right, the cunning that lurked in his features spoke plainly that the bear had turned into a fox.

Speechless, with his head uncovered, he mournfully stood before the litter and the corpse. Human beings cannot look at such a sad sight as if they were marble statues. Romans, like other men, were made of flesh and blood, and, as such, could not look upon the dead, and the mourner for the dead, without pity and compassion.

Suddenly and abruptly Antony turned his face from the litter to the multitude, and, as he did so, a glow of warmth and resolution ennobled his countenance. He had already made up his mind how to act. He knew that if he failed in carrying out his point he was as good as murdered. But, if he were to die, he must die nobly; if he were to live, he must live nobly

too. Life was his stake, death was his failure, vengeance was his success, greatness was his triumph !

He was no speaker—poor clumsy Antony—and, therefore, the assassins looked upon him as a safe speaker on this occasion. But his greatest and dearest friend lay before him, soaked with blood and pierced with daggers. Lifeless as the corpse was, he could hear Cæsar appealing to him in the silent language of death to take revenge upon these cowardly assassins. He had been just too late to save the life of his murdered friend, but he was in the right time to rescue his memory. What if he failed here also ? If the voice of a murderer found its way to the ears of the multitude, was the voice of a lover to go sighing away with the wind ? This was the truth of Antony, but the truth of love and devotion must conquer the truth of murder and assassination. To the astonishment of all the Romans, the bear played the part of a clever watchmaker.

Resolutely facing the crowd, Antony seemed like a lion brought to bay. There was something appalling in his eyes and face. All Rome was before him, and against all Rome he was now to combat.

“ Roman citizens ! ” rang out at last the clear voice of Antony. “ If there was an occasion in the history of the Roman world which required the ablest and most eloquent orator, *this* is that occasion. Surely I am the wrong man for it ; but wrong men are sometimes in the right place, and at the right time.”

“ He speaks like a man of letters, that bear of an Antony,” remarked one of the bystanders to a neighbour.

“ If the transactions of the day,” answered the latter, “ don’t teach a bear how to speak, I don’t know what would.”

“ Listen ! He goes on with his speech.”

"The only able man," went on Antony, seeking to be impressive rather than eloquent. "The only able man who could discharge this office, with honour to himself and the memory of the departed, is noble Brutus, but him I see not among us. It is with his gracious permission, and that of his noble friends, that I am allowed to stand before you."

"He talks very highly of Brutus," remarked one.

"He has to, or I assure you his head would not remain very long on his shoulders," was the answer.

"Brutus," went on the speaker, "is the only right man, for of all Cæsar's friends, he was the dearest and nearest to his heart."

"Indeed he was," remarked a fellow.

"If there was anything constant in Cæsar," continued Antony, "it was his unlimited love to Brutus. He would have doubted himself before doubting Brutus; he would have injured himself before injuring a hair in Brutus' head. In the battle of Pharsalia, he left his regiments, and risked the fortune of war, simply to save him. He pardoned him after he had conspired against Cæsar, and raised him to be one of his trustees. He appointed him Governor of the Cisalpine Gauls. He always called him his dear son, and, on the morning of this very day, he raised him to the highest possible rank, and, along with this promotion, appointed his brother, Cassius, the Governor of Syria. While the secretaries were busy copying the orders in the Senate, the dagger of noble Brutus, and those of his noble friends, were busy piercing the body of their benefactor."

A murmur like the sound of distant waters followed. Then the word "traitors!" was hissed by many. The puppet was being wound up again.

"I am," continued the speaker, "no man of words; and I wish Brutus were here to melt the ice of your hearts. Had *he* been now speaking to you, you would see Cæsar the great a thousand times greater than I can ever portray him to you. But Brutus has already told you that Cæsar was ambitious; and I dare not gainsay noble Brutus. Cæsar's arms subdued the fiercest nations under the sun; his valour stormed the strongest holds in the wildest mountains; his resources filled the empty treasury of the State. Could these things be achieved without ambition? Had any of our greatest and most illustrious ancestors achieved deeds of courage and valour without ambition? Can any public man exist in the world without ambition? If any, I care not to know him; for such a man is utterly worthless. But Cæsar's ambition, like himself, was great and noble. It was to make Rome glorious and prosperous. His only aim was to extend her glory to the uttermost parts of the earth. Are these noble aspirations to be called criminal ambitions?"

"Criminal ambitions make people mean, selfish, and cruel; but Cæsar was always generous to his enemies, magnanimous to his opponents, and kindness personified to his friends. Even now, when his tongue is locked in death, if he could utter a word, it would be to forgive Brutus, once more, as he did after Pharsalia; yes, he would clasp him to the very heart which was pierced by the hand of noble Brutus and his friends."

"Coward and traitor!" cried the crowd. "Call you him noble again?"

"But Cæsar," went on the cunning speaker, "can no more speak; his jaw is firmly locked in cruel death; his body is pierced with the gentle hand of Brutus, and those of his

friends. Cæsar could not have suffered much, noble citizens, for a friendly hand, and a sharp dagger, give no pain. What a great soul his must have been, to have borne all those stabs and thrusts from gentle Brutus, and his gentle friends! Would you care to see them, gentlemen?"

Hundreds of voices cried, "Yes! yes!"

"Very well," said the orator, "I will show them presently to you."

Mournfully, but respectfully, Antony knelt before the litter, and uncovered it. Cæsar's mantle, all covered with blood, was over the corpse. Antony grasped and held it high up in his hand, so that all could see it.

The groans and sighs of the crowd sounded like a sea whipped by an angry wind.

"You have only seen Cæsar's mantle," continued Antony cunningly. "You shall now see Cæsar himself, not great, and full of life and smiles, as he came down to the Senate, but pale and lifeless, all covered with wounds and stabs, struck into him with the treacherous daggers of his treacherous friends. Make way for me, noble compatriots, so that you may all the better see the Martyr of Rome."

With the greatest promptitude and respect the populace made way for him, and the slaves, still standing by the sides of the corpse, once more carried the litter, and placed it in the very midst of the crowd.

At the sight of the corpse the crowd was aghast trembling, and gaping with open mouths. Shrieks and screams, as of women maddened at the sudden sight of a murdered father, or brother, or husband, rose high up to the roof. The people beyond the immediate circle round the litter caught the agitation, and, without being able to see the dumb wounds, they

echoed the shrieks and groans, until the Forum seemed to shake.

"Is it the shrieks of my dear compatriots that I hear?" went on Antony, much moved at this manifestation. "No; this is not the voice of Rome. She could do something more effectual than scream and shriek. It is the voice of Cæsar's blood, rising up towards heaven, invoking the vengeance of the gods. It is his suffering soul—suffering, even after death, at the treachery and ingratitude of his cowardly murderers—that is ringing in my ears. It is to the noble Romans that his blood appeals. Is it to cry in vain?"

"Out upon the traitors!" cried many voices.

"Death to the cowards!" cried others.

"You hear this, and yet you stand still, like marble statues?" cried a third, with a crack in his shrill voice.

At this rebuke the people swayed to and fro in a menacing way, deeply stirred and angry.

"Stop! stop!" rang again the clear strong voice of Antony. "You have seen Cæsar's mantle; you have seen Cæsar himself, but you haven't yet seen his stabs, gentlemen. It is those stabs which noble Brutus, and his noble friends, inflicted upon him that I would like to show you. Wait only for a moment, and you shall see them, noble citizens—everyone of them."

"You still call these traitors noble? By Jupiter, say this another time, and dearly as we love you, you are a dead man!" cried the stern voices of several strong men, looking as if they meant to strike.

"Once you object to this false title," answered Antony, "I must call them by their right one—murderers and assassins that they are.—Look you here, noble citizens?" and as he

took off the cloth that covered the corpse the naked body came to view.

The crowd grew hysterical, tumultuous, almost beyond control.

“Here,” continued the orator, pointing with his forefinger to Cæsar’s neck, “here is the first stab that fell upon the greatest man Rome ever produced—it is the stab of Casca—here went in the dagger of Metellus—there flourished the weapon of Cassius—it is his gratitude for the Governorship of Syria—there pierced Ligarius—here dashed the steel of Cinna—just in this spot struck Titinius—yonder Messala—over there Volumnius, Trebonius, and all the rest of those patriotic murderers.”

“But I reserve the most treacherous one to the last—here stabbed the treacherous dagger of Cæsar’s son—Cæsar’s son, gentlemen! It is here that Brutus rewarded his great benefactor for all the goodness and kindness shewn to him. See you how deep the wound is? It went right through the heart which always cherished and loved Brutus. It is at the *heart* he aimed, for it was the heart of Cæsar that loved him—see you how sharp the dagger was? A piercing clean cut, and it gave Cæsar no pain, for it was with the gentle treacherous hand of Brutus that the blow was given. Cæsar felt no pain then, but he feels it now, and his blood, still warm and oozing, supplicates the Romans to take vengeance upon his assassins. Speechless as he is, he appeals to you in silent agony of his soul. See you not how his eyes, though glazed and firm, gaze steadfastly at you? With one word Cæsar could, this morning, have shaken the whole world. Will his speechless supplications move not the emotions of his compatriots?

“Gaze no more at him, noble citizens, for it is a ghastly sight to look at, but on the cowardly traitors pour your vengeance and revenge.”

And once more Antony reverentially knelt before Cæsar and kissed his hand.

Like a furious sea breaking through its dykes, the rushing multitudes rose and burst from the great building, their cries sounding far and wide in the startled ears of the startled citizens—up to the sky, in the squares, along the streets, into shops and palaces—“Death to the traitors! Death to the traitors!”

CHAPTER XLVI.

MORTAL ENEMIES FACE TO FACE.

AMIDST the high trees and the blossoming flowers of an extensive garden sat a young lady with a fur purple mantle round her body. At the bright flowers, toned down by the faint moonlight, she looked and smiled. The trees towered high above her head, throwing their long shadows over the shrubs and plants. The air was still and odorous. All was silent beauty and happiness.

The young lady, bending her elbow on the arm of a comfortable chair, and her head on her hand, gazed around as if absorbed in an ecstasy of meditation and joyful reminiscences.

How sweet and delicious are these moments when, undisturbed by the cares of the world, the soul seems freed from its mortal shrine, and revels in joy and hope! How sweet are the fancies of the mind when happiness, memory, and imagination, give them wings!

On the road leading to the abode of this fair lady, a man, enveloped in a black cloak and mounted on a grey horse, was sadly and slowly advancing. He frowned at times, his face contracted, he gnashed his teeth, and he looked the picture of despair. He looked as he felt. The world seemed all a blank. Distracted and hopeless, he still had command over himself. With bowed head he rode on, paying no attention to anything round him.

Tears now and then mounted to his bloodshot eyes; but

with a supreme effort they vanished. His temples were burning, and in vain he pressed his hands against them. His brain seemed on fire. Objects rolled before him like sand in a whirlwind. The slight murmur of the leaves startled him. A figure, in the faint uncertain light, always rose before and looked reproachingly upon him. He shut his eyes with both hands, but in vain. Oh ! if that figure would but disappear ! But no ; at every step it rose before him and followed him like his own shadow. He was flying, but no one was pursuing him. So Cain felt when the blood of an Abel was crying up to heaven against him. Twice did his hand grasp the dagger that was buried in his bosom to thrust it into his heart, and twice did the hand fail to execute the behest of the will.

“ No, not now,” murmured he to himself ; “ there is time yet.”

Arriving at a solitary place in the suburbs of Rome, he dismounted from his horse and asked to be led at once to the presence of the mistress of the palace. A slave led the way before him to the garden. “ In that arbour yonder,” pointed the slave with his finger, and then retraced his steps.

The lady was still in the same position, wrapped in her mantle of purple ; lost in thought trying to solve some great problem that half amused and half perplexed her.

“ He must have delayed it till morning,” she murmured to herself, “ but this is unlike him. He should have sent me a message—but no matter ; a delay of a few hours does no harm, and he will soon be here to explain matters.”

Scarcely had she come to this conclusion when a light step was heard advancing on the green path leading to the arbour. Raising her head from her arm, she looked forward, and to her great delight the long-expected figure appeared advancing

towards her. He came, as he always used to do, a mantle round his body.

Quitting her place, she stepped out light as a gazelle to meet him.

“Dear Cæsar!” said she, throwing her white arms round his neck, “I am tired of waiting.”

The figure rudely pushed her away from him. What was her horror when, instead of Julius Cæsar, a man with a frowning look and stern features gazed into her startled face! Marcus Brutus and Cleopatra Ptolemy stood face to face!

Like a woman suddenly encountering a wild beast, the Queen recoiled with terror. The moon shed down her faint rays on the two mortal enemies. They were both deathly pale now. Their eyes glared into one another like balls of fire; and as the tiger quakes before the spring of a boa, so did Brutus in his turn tremble and recoil before the Queen of Egypt.

“May we know,” said Cleopatra, as soon as she could find words—“may we know for what purpose we have the honour of your visit.”

“It is to arrange for the wedding,” answered Brutus, with bitter irony, but which was so well hid that it sounded sincere.

The Queen, being aware of the intimate relation that existed between Cæsar and Brutus, thought that in all likelihood her lover, much pressed for time, had despatched his dear and trusted friend to arrange for the affair of the morrow, and that Brutus, seeing the union inevitable, could do no better than reconcile himself to fate, and court the gracious pleasure of the Queen.

The terror that manifested itself on her face vanished. Her

eyes danced with joy, and leading him to the arbour, she ordered him to sit near her.

"What beautiful weather!" remarked Cleopatra, trying to find something to open conversation. "It augurs well for our union with our illustrious lover."

"Very propitious indeed, madam," answered Brutus, absent-mindedly.

"This is the first time we meet after you left our beautiful shores."

"Yes, madam, it is the first time."

"You had a happy time there, hadn't you? Our shores are always fascinating."

"Bewitching!"

"It is a great sacrifice," went on the Queen, with a royal patronising air, for she already looked upon herself as a Queen over the Romans—"it is a great sacrifice to leave my fertile empire and come to reign in Rome, but it is a sacrifice which I hope the Romans will appreciate. We and our illustrious lover will reign in perfect harmony and accord. When lovers reign," went on her Majesty, playing on the words, "when lovers reign it will be a reign of love, you know."

"Perfectly so, madam, perfectly so."

"I shall not modify my methods here, for all men are alike, and what succeeds in one place does so in another, I believe. I have been wonderfully successful with those dogs of Alexandrians. I have given them lessons which they will not soon forget, I hope; but if they do, I can easily remind them. It is not a difficult thing to put up a gallows," she added with a smile, "my men are quite accustomed to the

work now, and nothing is easier for them. Do you often have recourse to the gallows here?"

"We never use it, madam."

"What! use no gallows in Rome? It reflects against the Capitol; it is a disparaging thing to the authority of any nation to have no gallows. I judge the strength and wisdom of a nation by the number of gallowses it puts up within a certain length of time. Am I not right?"

"Quite right, madam, quite right."

"Such lessons," resumed the Queen, "will be very wholesome to the Romans too, and teach them discipline and respect for authority. Things are lax and loose at present; but by degrees they will come to learn them. Nothing baffles Cleopatra, sir."

"Nothing, nothing, madam."

"If I hate anything in this world it is impertinence, and high notions among subjects. High heads must bite the dust before the cure is effected. Your Republic of several hundred years standing spoiled people, sir. People in Rome got into their stupid heads that all men and women were equal. A more erroneous idea I have never heard in my life. What Rome requires now is a monarchy to establish order and discipline; all subjects must bow low before crowned heads; if they do not prostrate themselves alive, they have to prostrate themselves dead, and between these two forms of respect very few prefer the latter. Nothing succeeds like firmness, sir; we have to be firm with our subjects, or what is the use of crowns and sceptres? Many people will lose their heads before this is effected; true, but it will be effected at last, and order will be re-established once more. Some may call these proceedings *cruelty*, but I call them *justice*, and our subjects must take the

definition which their Queen chooses for them. Am I mistaken ? ”

“ Quite logical, your Majesty.”

“ Now and then I may have to draw a few lists in the evenings. Though they may make my hands tired, I shall sacrifice my happiness and pleasures for the sake of my subjects. You have heard of my lists, haven't you ? Well, it is a good thing you did. You are Cæsar's confidential man, you shall be mine, too ; I will accord you this position as a favour. Well, I tell you in confidence that my lists are already drawn. Up to the present they contain only five hundred names. I am thinking of trying mild measures at first. If they do not answer my purpose, it has to be done in a wholesale manner, when people will surely be brought to reason. These five hundred names must be my wedding gift from Rome. Few as the number is, Cæsar objected yesterday to my method ; but he will come round by-and-bye. Moreover, you must use your influence with him, and persuade him to agree to them ; and as a remuneration for your trouble I shall leave a space of ten names vacant in every list for your own use ; if you have any now I should be only too pleased to add them. More names, you know, make the affair more royal.”

“ Very generous of you, your Majesty. You overwhelm me with kindness.”

“ Not a word of thanks, noble Brutus, we must begin to be familiar friends, and between friends there should be no ceremonies. Rome must have a severe lesson before she can learn Cleopatra's methods. I generally write my laws with letters of blood, they last long, and besides, it is a beautiful colour for writing. But we shall have ample time

to discuss these matters later on—and now to business. How did the crowning go on to-day?" asked her Majesty, with a coquettish motion of the head, "admirably well, I suppose?"

"It didn't go on at all, madam," answered the man grinding his teeth.

"What! Cæsar not crowned to-day? Phthah forgive my idleness! I never inquired into the matter to-day. In the first place I took it for granted that it must take place; in the second place, this day being the one fixed for our wedding, I did not like to appear as if I were in a hurry about it; this becomes neither my lofty crown, nor my womanly pride. Then, is the occasion to take place to-morrow?"

"No, your Majesty. Cæsar has given up the idea of the crown."

"What do you say?" and the Queen sat up erect in her seat, all her coquettish air vanishing in a moment. "Has Cæsar given up the crown, you say?"

"Yes, your Majesty."

"Some pressing business stood between him and the crown? It must have been of the utmost and most urgent importance to cause such a delay."

"Your Majesty is quite right; something of the utmost importance delayed it, madam."

"And the wedding?" asked Cleopatra breathlessly, forgetting in her anxiety to inquire into the cause that delayed Cæsar becoming king.

"Cæsar has given up the idea of the wedding as well, madam."

As if pierced by a sharp arrow, Cleopatra rose to her feet in a passion of pain and rage. Her face grew dark and scowling. Could she believe her ears?

"Are you dreaming, young man? Cæsar will never postpone our wedding, not even for a single day."

"It has been given up for ever, madam!"

Cleopatra was like a wild and enraged tigress, as she listened to the awful news. Her eyes almost started from their sockets, her face twitched, her hands shut and opened again, and her whole form trembled. She glared at Brutus as if temporarily insane and speechless.

"Miserable wretch!" she shrieked at last. "Miserable wretch! Are you come here to insult our honour and pride? Know you not that nothing but *death* can stand between me and Cæsar? Nothing but death, sir."

"And death *has* stood between you and him!"

Rigid, appalled, angry beyond speech, Cleopatra glared at him as if to consume him.

"It is false!" she shrieked, with a hoarse voice. "It is false. You are a liar!"

"Infernal and wicked woman!" thundered Brutus at last, rising to his feet in terrible anger. "Infernal and wicked woman! It is your wickedness and vileness that have deprived us of the ablest and bravest man Roman blood ever produced. You may well tremble to learn the disastrous news. Is Rome to be trodden under the feet of an Egyptian queen? By all the gods of Rome no! Not even for the sake of illustrious Cæsar. Is the Capitol to be sold to a witch in the shape of a fascinating woman? Shame and dishonour to all Romans if they were to allow such a debasement to take place. Is Rome to be turned into another Alexandria, where you can practice your infernal crimes, shed the blood of her noblest youth, violate her sacred laws, turn her happiness into misery, and her freedom into slavery? You have already

prepared your lists, demon! Cherish and keep them as the memory of crimes abhorred by men on earth and gods in heaven. Your subjects groan under swords of fire and spikes of iron. Stare at me as long as you please, evil incarnate that you are! You have tried your utmost to get rid of me. The assassins you commissioned to destroy my life, and that of my friend Lucilius, have all perished by our swords, but in their last moments they confessed their crime and yours. Your brother you have poisoned at your table with your own hand. You shed streams of innocent blood, which cry up to heaven for justice. Death stood between you and Cæsar, but learn to your mortification that even if he remained alive he would have loathed you as a disgusting creature. He already let this out as he was coming down to the Senate. If this fact had only been known at that moment, Great Cæsar the dead would have still been Great Cæsar the living. I have murdered him with my own hand, miserable wretch that I am; and if it were not for the gratification which it might give you, suicide would have brought peace to my tormented soul. You call me liar? Here is the dagger that pierced the heart of the dearest friend and benefactor I ever had in this world!" And bringing his hand to his bosom, Brutus grasped the weapon still stained with the noble blood, and showed it to Cleopatra.

"If you were a man," continued Brutus, "this very same dagger, with one thrust, would have pierced your cruel heart. But you are a woman, and thus your weakness becomes your protection. You are a vile woman, and, therefore, the noble blood that still clings to this dagger cannot be debased by yours. But this I tell you. Depart this very night, and let Rome be no more defiled by your presence. If you remain

to see another sun rise in Rome, you shall never live to see it set; not even your sex can then safeguard you. Measures have already been taken to deprive you of your throne. The gods will wreak their vengeance upon you in their own way. Take this with you, a wretched remembrance, to remind you of the great crime you have caused in Rome." And he threw at her the dagger, which, with a dull clink, fell at her feet.

A scream, like that of the agony of death, rung out on the still night air, and Cleopatra fell down senseless to the ground!

* * * *

The next morning the palace was empty and silent.

CHAPTER XLVII.

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH.

THE city was still throbbing with the news of the great murder of the Ides of March. All the houses were in wild confusion—all except one little palace on a prominent little hill. Its inhabitants were in perfect and placid ignorance of the horrible deed that had taken place in the very heart of the Senate Hall.

The principal inmate of the palace was a delicate young lady. Her face, once rosy and glowing with life and beauty, was now pale and careworn with suffering. Her eyes, though big and bright, were drooping. Her hands were so delicate that every vein was distinctly seen. She stood before the window of her saloon and looked at the beautiful panorama before her. Human figures flitted before her eyes, running here and there. Never before did she notice the citizens of Rome so excited. The whole city seemed in confusion. But objects had long ceased to have any meaning to the poor suffering creature. Neither human beings, nor houses, nor trees, nor any other object could deeply stir her emotion. Life seemed to have been crushed because hope was dead.

One would take her to be a great princess, for her noble soul shone through her misery. But the chains that rattled on her feet plainly showed that she was only a slave, though the gold substance of the chains revealed that she was a *royal* slave.

Tired of looking on the city, Arsino seated herself in a

comfortable chair near which stood a black screen standing between it and the door. The chains rattled on her feet, but they ceased to raise any anger or rage in her heart: the course of discipline had done its work.

“What is the meaning of my life?” stammered the poor creature to herself. “Munda has long been lost, and Sextus is a wanderer on mountains and deserts; hunted out from one place to another like a roebuck, with no asylum to receive him nor hope to cheer his life. What am I to live for? dragging these chains of slavery and leading a life of misery, what is the meaning of my existence? My only hope is in death; but even this has been denied me. Oh! my gods have pity upon me, and grant me this effectual cure for human suffering!”

Looking up in a supplicating manner, with her soft eyes heavenwards, her features sorrow-stricken, pale and ghastly, resigned grief touchingly appealing to superhuman beings, she was the picture of pathetic gentleness and noble sorrow.

How long she remained in this reverie she could not remember; but she was aroused at last. Three hard knocks came against the door, and without further ceremony a man entered the saloon, and, walking towards the Princess, coolly seated himself in an impertinently familiar way in an opposite chair before her. She recognised in him Apollodorus, the Cilician!

But sudden things ceased to produce a permanent impression on the broken-hearted Princess. The only symptom of surprise was that she opened her eyes a little more than usual, and then suddenly relapsed into her old condition of dignified indifference.

“Well,” asked the Princess after a moment’s pause, “what

occasion brings the trustee of Queen Cleopatra to the presence of Arsino?"

Apollodorus did not answer; but, putting his hand into his bosom, he brought out a dagger, a rope, and a cup. Filling the last with a rosy fluid from a little phial in his pocket, he placed all three articles on the table before them. Crossing his arms on his chest, he simply looked into the face of the unfortunate Princess without uttering a single syllable.

The Princess gazed at the strange articles before her, and smiled bitterly. "There *are* gods in heaven after all," murmured she to herself, "and they *have* heard the prayer of my heart."

Apollodorus, who expected to hear a shriek of agony from the sister of his royal mistress, was greatly astonished to note the perfect indifference evident on her peaceful face.

"Well?" asked Arsino, still smiling with a dignity and composure which rather astonished the man before her.

"Well," answered the Cicilian, "you see three articles on this table: my orders from her Majesty are clear and decisive—you have to choose one of them."

"Her Majesty is very considerate to give me a choice in the matter. One would hardly expect such condescension from her," replied Arsino bitterly.

"I have," remarked the Cicilian, with a wicked wink of the eye, "I have express orders from the Queen not to oppose your choice in any way. She clearly pointed out to me that I would incur her displeasure if I did, and you know what the displeasure of her Majesty means."

"It means one of these three things, I suppose."

"Quite so, good Princess; but in my case there will be no choice. It is not to everybody that her Majesty accords such

a token of goodwill. With you she acts as becomes your birth and rank. See here," and he put his hand on the weapon, "here is a dagger, it is sharp—so sharp that it gives no pain. Its handle is of gold to be worthy of the delicate and princely hand that touches it. The blade is gilt; and not only that, but there is an inscription on it fit for the occasion. Look here, and see what royal consideration there is in that inscription."

Arsino looked, and read the inscribed gilded words.

"A birthday gift!"

She then put her right hand to her forehead, trying to remember something forgotten.

"True!" murmured the unfortunate Princess, half to herself, half to the man before her, "true! it is my birthday, and I forgot all about it. But chains and imprisonment do not help the memory much. It is well befitting that the day which brought me to the world should carry me away from it. It is a great blessing that it should be so."

"Well," went on Apollodorus, taking little notice of her remarks. "Here is another mark of favour," and he put his hand on the rope. "You see it is of the finest white silk to suit the neck it should embrace. Ordinary mortals," added the malicious man with bitter sarcasm, "ordinary mortals would have had an ordinary one of coarse hemp. Both do the service they are intended for, but a white silk cord is a more delicate material for delicate necks. Besides, it is not likely to snap like other cords; and consequently it takes away the painful task of applying it once more. If you don't call this consideration, I don't know what is."

"It's royal condescension, sir, and no mistake."

"Well," continued the impertinent man with his mortifying

sarcasm, "here is a third article," and he pointed his forefinger to the cup. "See, it is all of pure gold; gold, you know, is the most precious metal in the world; it is the only kind of metal used by royal personages, especially by her gracious Majesty. Common men and women would have the draught given them in a brass goblet; but the Queen does everything in her own royal style."

"Her Majesty is exceedingly obliging."

"In it," continued the impudent Cicilian, pointing with his finger towards the fatal fluid that sparkled in the goblet, "in it you see a clear, beautiful liquor; its effects are instantaneous; it does not take more than one minute, and then you will be free—free like a bird!"

The Cicilian, in his boisterous explanation, could not hear a light step nor notice a figure that quickly flitted into the room, and stood in front of the screen behind which the Princess and her tormentor were seated.

"What a fine thing to be free like a bird, after such a long life of slavery and suffering!" went on Apollodorus. "It is because her Majesty has pity and compassion upon you that she sent you these precious gifts, giving you the choice of whichever you please. They are all fine things, noble Princess, and with such variety one is puzzled, I must confess, which to select. But if you consult me, good Princess, choose the cup; take my advice, and you shall find that I did not deceive you. Her Majesty, before leaving the Alexandrian shores, was engaged in making a few scientific experiments on some wretched prisoners who, in one way or other, offended her Majesty, and, after several thousand experiments, she came to the conclusion that this was the safest and quickest method. I call it a safe method, good Princess, because however small

may be the dose taken, it always produces the same precise and definite effects. Other poisons kill as surely as this, but they take time and cause suffering. Her Majesty cannot tolerate the sight of suffering, except in the cause of science. She is a scientific genius, and takes much pains to obtain precision, for she takes every little detail into consideration. This is," repeated he, pointing with his finger once more to the deadly draught, "this is, in her judgment, the quickest and best drug, and you know the Queen makes no rash judgments. So, depend upon it, noble Princess, it is the surest and safest way to free yourself from this hateful slavery."

"Your advice will be followed, and that instantly," replied Arsino, still dignified and indifferent, and she put her hand on the fatal cup.

"Stop! stop!" sounded again the voice of Cleopatra's trustee. "Her Majesty expected you would supplicate for mercy. She never thought that your misery was so great that it would make life a burden to you," remarked he, trying to make light of her heroism. "I was ordered that if you asked for mercy, I was to listen to your voice; and in case you did not, I was to offer it to you."

A cloud of disappointment manifested itself on the face of the Princess.

"But it must be done on one condition," remarked the Cilician. "Perhaps you are aware that the greatest part of your misery arises from an attachment you contracted with a certain Sextus Pompey. Well, after your departure with great Cæsar, who to-day is to be wedded to my illustrious Queen—the ceremony may be taking place this very moment—young Sextus lingered awhile in Alexandria for some political purposes

of his own. The Queen, out of consideration to services rendered her late sire by his deceased father, showed some kindnesses which were misinterpreted by the conceited young man, and he took into his stupid head that the Queen was actually in love with him, and he impertinently remarked that he could make no alliance with her Majesty, except in a political way. Malicious tongues said her Majesty had a weakness for the young man; but I did not come here to discuss such matters; what concerns me in this affair is, to tell you that he drew upon himself her royal displeasure, and, had he not fled for life, he would have been a dead man long ago, and Rome would have been spared the expense and trouble of the chastisement she inflicted upon him in Munda. Now, if you will renounce the love of this impertinent fellow, and get yourself connected with some Roman noble—Roman marriages with foreigners are officially allowed now—the Queen can punish him in this way through you, and your faults will be forgiven."

Arsino looked at the Cicilian with utter contempt. "Her Majesty," she answered, "has control over everything in this world, even her heart. She can love many people at one time, or separately, as is convenient to her. I am weak and powerless, having no control over anything, much less over my heart. My life I can easily part with, but noble Sextus Pompey, never!" and she drew herself up proudly to her full height.

"In that case you have to part with both."

"What must be, must be."

"Then you prefer to die rather than break your alliance with a ruined man?"

"This is exactly what I prefer."

“ Well,” answered Apollodorus, with a malignant smile on his face, “ in this case I have to repeat my advice to you. The cup, Princess, the cup ! It is the quickest and surest way ; besides, its beautiful rosy colour is not unworthy of your beautiful cheeks.”

As long as the cruel tormentor kept his bitter irony within the bounds of decency, Arsino bore it with astonishing calmness and courage, however piercing and unpleasant it was ; but the moment he made this impudent allusion her face turned crimson, and her old haughty demeanour returned.

“ Impudent and insolent wretch ! ” she cried, with a clear high-pitched voice, her eyes flashing with rage. “ Insolent wretch ! Know before whom you are talking, dog of a Cicilian. If you forgot the laws of decency in the court of Cleopatra, you must remember them in the presence of Arsino.”

“ Talk not so loud, royal slave ! I have a few men with me down in the ground floor who can persuade you to speak with more respect to the Queen’s messenger. You are a helpless woman, and your Sextus is far away, like a wild goat on the mountains, and so he cannot be of much help to you now. The cup, royal slave ! the cup ! ”

“ It is a great mercy to have such a draught at hand ; as I want help to get rid of such an insolent wretch, it is a great great boon to me.”

“ Drink to the health of Sextus Pompey, Princess,” replied Apollodorus, with a bitter smile.

“ It is to his health I drink ! ” replied the heroic Princess. “ May the good gods bless him, and protect him ! ” and she lifted the cup in her hand.

Just as the fatal cup touched her lips, a strange, strange

apparition suddenly appeared before her, close to the black screen.

“Sextus was far away,” thundered a strong, stern voice in the ears of the startled Cicilian, “but he has come back in time to wreak vengeance upon you, miserable and wretched dog of a coward!” and, with a single thrust of his drawn sword, the insolent wretch, yelling like a dog, fell rolling at the feet of the Princess before him.

At the sight of this miraculous apparition, the cup trembled in Arsino’s hand, and fell to the ground. The Princess, with a loud scream of joy, fell, almost fainting, into the outstretched arms of her deliverer and lover.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE APPARITION.

DAYS have come and gone, and Rome was no better. The great man who, with his herculean grasp, could hold that monster in his powerful hand, had passed away, to return no more. He was leading her on the way of grandeur and happiness, but Rome knew him not. The only fault his enemies could find with him was his ambition. They might as well have said his greatness, for the two are inseparable. No man, in the whole history of the world, ever rose, and raised with him a nation, without that stimulus. What harm will the ambition of a man do, if it tends to make people happy and prosperous? The Republic must have tottered to the ground. Like every other organic constitution, she had her birth, growth, maturity, old age, and now she was in death throes. Nothing in the world can save such an institution, when it has passed all these stages. Some infant institution must be the outcome of these birth-death throes, and take the place of the old, in one way or other. This is the law of Nature, and Rome—even Rome—must bow before the laws of Nature !

The head of Rome died, and Rome lived without a head. The limbs and organs of the political constitution acted without harmony ; and *chance* took the place of *design*, and *confusion* replaced *order*. Small men took the place of the great man ; but it was like so many little children trying to perform the duty of one great man. Roman blood flowed in the city and

out of the city in torrents. Rome sighed for the good old days. She would have willingly made the greatest sacrifice to have back again "*The Man of Ambition.*" Never were the merits of Cæsar so appreciated as after his death. It is so with every man, and in every age. We never appreciate the value of those among us until we lose them, when appreciation will be of no use. It would not be human if it were otherwise.

In the plain of Sardis an army was encamped in a green spot. The uniform of the men plainly showed they were Roman soldiers. The night was clear and silent, and all men were sound asleep. One man only was still up in his tent seated before a plain table. His lofty air, and the guard placed round the tent, indicated that he was the General of all the forces that encamped in that extensive plain.

Two years have passed since we saw him last, but two years have wrought wonderful changes both in his health and looks. Though still in the prime of life, his face and grey hairs tell a sad tale of suffering and worry. The consciousness of having done a great wrong—an irreparable wrong—had photographed itself on his pale face.

At the plain table he sat plunged in melancholy thoughts. The candle at his side threw its pale light upon him. His arm rested on the table, and his head on the palm of his left hand. The stillness that surrounded him appeared like the silence of death. It was long past midnight, and the man had not changed his attitude. It was decidedly a spell of melancholia that kept him in this ecstasy of mind and catalepsy of body.

"He was to me as affectionate as a father, and as tender as a mother" he mused to himself. Then he looked at his right hand resting on his knee; the blood stains that once marked

it were washed away long ago ; but art had not yet found or could ever find something to wash out the stains of memory. He gazed at the hand, and it seemed to him as if the blood spots were as fresh on it as when it drew that noblest blood of all Romans."

Once more the righteous voice of conscience rang in his ears. He essayed to deafen the voice, but in vain.

"I wish man could exist without a conscience," he thought to himself. It would be much wiser, man, had you wished human beings could exist without guilt, when we should always be at peace with our conscience. It is the substitute of Heaven on earth, and do what you like you can never silence the righteous voice of Heaven.

The marks of blood appeared clearer and clearer to him in the pale light until he felt sick at heart. The dream of bettering Rome had passed as all dreams do. The stimulant was gone. He shed the blood of his dearest friend to save Rome. But instead of doing that he was unconsciously planning her ruin. The only man who could keep peace and order was gone, and now came the reign of terror and confusion.

He hid his hand behind his back ; he loathed the sight of it. It was the one that wielded the fatal dagger.

"What will be," mused he again to himself in his melancholy way. "What will be the verdict of history upon me?" Traitor, man, traitor, but perhaps in what you thought a good cause.

With all his might he tried to drive away from his memory the Ides of March, but he could not. It recurred more vividly than ever. He tried to get up from his seat, but to no purpose. A depression of a strange nature swept over him.

His face accidentally turned towards the door. He seemed

as if he was unconsciously expecting the arrival of something, though he could not tell what. His breathing was irregular and presently it almost ceased. His eyes were fixed as if on a strange unearthly object. A gentle ruffle was heard, and suddenly into the tent swept the proud and majestic figure of Julius Cæsar ! It looked Julius Cæsar himself, and no mistake ; it was the same commanding stature, the same high broad forehead, the same firm noble features. On his face was a glow of unusual grandeur ; a soft expression brightened his eagle eyes. He wore the same dazzling uniform as on the Ides of March. The gold fringes were clearly seen on his purple dress, while the precious stones glittered in the faint light.

Stepping softly and gently, Cæsar walked towards the affrighted man, and throwing his arms round his neck he embraced him tenderly, then stepping backwards took a seat opposite him. Julius Cæsar and Marcus Brutus looked eye to eye !

“A wounded father coming back to pardon his son,” said Cæsar in his usual genial way.

A deep groan came from the depth of Brutus's heart as if it were breaking with anguish. He wanted to cover his face with his hand, but he seemed paralytic, and his arm refused to move. He tried to cast his eyes on the ground, but towards those eagle eyes of the Dictator they were drawn as if by a powerful magnet. Oh, these moments of torture and agony when the murdered and the murderer looked face to face ! Brutus invoked both heaven and earth to fall upon him and cover him, but to no purpose.

The eyes of Cæsar looked into his with perfect equanimity ;

affection and kindness were still there. Brutus would have willingly given his life to avoid these soft kind-looking eyes.

Oh ! great gods ! ” murmured the conscience-stricken man. “ If he would only look a little stern or unkind I could bear his gaze—but, oh what a torture ! He can still look with love and affection at me, wretched man that I am ! ”

“ It’s only a wounded father coming back to forgive his beloved son ! ” repeated Julius Cæsar with a sweet smile.

Brutus heaved another sigh of extreme agony. “ He still calls me his beloved son ! ” he murmured. “ Me—the murderer who pierced his heart with a dagger. If he would only but speak one cruel word to me, my sufferings would be much less.”

“ Speak, Brutus, speak,” went on Cæsar with his gentle tone, “ for it is to a father you are talking.”

The command seemed to impart a certain amount of energy ; for suddenly Brutus found that he could now move his tongue.

“ Not dead ? ” ejaculated he at last with a supreme effort at speech.

“ Dead ? ” answered Cæsar with a look of astonishment on his face. “ Dead ? Oh, dear no ; there is no such thing as death in the universe. It is human ignorance that coined that word. Look at me, Brutus, do I look like a dead man ? ”

“ *But the Ides of March !* ” stammered out Brutus, more startled with this conversation than silence.

“ Oh ! you allude to that occasion in which I was wounded ? Well, it is for this that I am here now ; I come to grant you my full pardon and forgiveness.”

“ Only wounded ! not dead ? ” repeated the murderer, with a glimpse of hope.

“ Oh, dear, no ! Didn’t I tell you there is no such thing

as death; once alive, always alive. Look here, my son; do you find any wounds about me? They are all healed up, everyone of them—even that stab of yours, which went right through the heart. I felt only a slight twinge at the time; the dagger of a dear son can't be very painful to a loving father. It was only a slight twinge," added Cæsar, with a smile playing round his lips, "but I have just embraced and forgiven you, my Brutus."

A convulsive sound, half a sob, half a groan, was all the reply Brutus could give.

"But what of Rome?" continued Cæsar. "Is she now much happier than she had been before the Ides of March? If so, your dagger has not been wielded in vain; and with my forgiveness I add to you the blessing of the gods!"

Once more Marcus Brutus tried to cast his eyes on the ground, but the two great magnets before him kept them fixed and immovable, like those of a fascinated man.

"From the Ides of March until now," stammered out the unfortunate man, "she has never seen a happy day."

"Oh!" cried Cæsar, suddenly applying his hand to the left side of his chest, "oh! it is *now* that I feel my wounds. Sixty sharp daggers have been plunged into my body, but it is the stab that went right through the heart that I feel most. Rome is unhappy you say? Would to the gods that I could purchase her happiness with my blood! Gladly would I be willing to receive the same stabs again if they could only tend to make her prosperous and joyful. Can't *you* make her happy, Brutus?"

No answer came. With might and main the criminal struggled to look on the ground, but his eyes were fatally fixed on Cæsar's.

"They are my children, these Romans, Brutus; I cannot bear to see them suffer. Their happiness was the height of my ambition; it was the aim of my greatness. All the battles I won, all the victories I achieved, all the glory I possessed—all were useless, and waste of energy and blood, if Rome be not happy. Oh! it is now that I feel my wounds. Sixty daggers were plunged several times into my body; they are painful and fatal; but more painful and fatal than all," repeated Cæsar, with a bitter smile, "is that one which was plunged right through the heart—all my wounds re-open now—look here, my son!"

Brutus was looking all the time; but what a terrible sight! In the twinkle of an eye Cæsar's figure was transformed; high and majestic it stood before Brutus, but pierced and bleeding, as it was on the Ides of March!

"Oh, my gods! my gods!" cried the unfortunate man. "Have pity on me, and give me death! This is more than human nature can bear."

Out gushed the bright red liquid from the wounds of the noble figure before him—blood on the Tyrian purple uniform, blood on the floor, blood on the walls of the tent, blood on the criminal hand! Brutus was dizzy and sick at heart.

"For heaven's sake, have pity on my suffering soul, and leave me!" he cried, with the moaning sound of a man in despair.

But not even then did the figure frown at him. Smiling, and with a look of compassion, Cæsar once more stepped towards the unfortunate man and, having embraced him, hugged him tenderly to his heart. He felt that he was enveloped in a cloud of fire.

"Once more I pardon you, and forgive you," said the

retreating figure. "Be happy, and make Rome happy too. We shall meet again once more."

"Meet again?" shrieked the man in despair.

"Yes, at Philippi!" answered Cæsar.

"Oh, have pity, pity!" groaned again the criminal.

"At Philippi! at Philippi!" repeated Cæsar, as he vanished by the door he entered.

Covered with cold sweat, and feeling stiff with pain, Marcus Brutus could not, for the first time, move his head. Still dilated and frightened, his eyes followed the figure as he retreated, and he imagined he could see the blood dropping behind him, step by step.

He tried to move his limbs. He could move them this time. He stood up, walked to the door, and stepped outside. The grey dawn was begining to appear on the horizon. The silence of the night still reigned, and the sky looked down sternly, and reproachingly, upon him.

He walked towards the guards that were stationed near his tent. All were in their places, but all looked as ghastly as dead men.

"Have you seen anybody step into my tent?" asked he from the principal officer.

"Yes, but it was no less a personage than Julius Cæsar!" answered the man, with a trembling voice and shaking limbs.

"Did he speak to any of you?"

"Not a single syllable—speechless he went in, and speechless he came out!"

A chill shook the whole system of Brutus. The colour of blood was still haunting his eyes. He felt as if the noble figure was still standing before him, with its dazzling uniform and noble features; even then he could feel the hot flame that

seemed to burn into his soul as he embraced him. The Ides of March, with all its horrible transactions, came vividly back before his memory, as if they were but the doing of the day that had passed. Overpowered with a feeling of utter weakness and bewilderment, he re-entered his tent, and threw himself on his bed, fainting and senseless.

CHAPTER XLIX.

AN UNPLEASANT INTERVIEW.

SULTRY and dull was the afternoon. The sun had dried up all vegetation. Withered and leafless stood the trees in the distance. A few clouds covered the face of the sky, giving a hazy look to the light of the sun. The hills in the neighbourhood trembled in the heat, and plains seemed a desert.

Full of melancholy, Brutus sat in his tent. The apparition of the night before had not yet faded from his memory. The tent, even then, seemed as if stained with the drops of blood that fell there the night before, and the shadows of the trees without recalled to his imagination the figure that swept into the tent. Oh, the horrors of that night! What a terrible thing it was when the murderer and the murdered looked face to face!

Beside the patriotic murderer stood a friend, also a patriotic murderer, and also sad and melancholy. Things had not gone on with them so well as they expected; and the future did not look to them very bright either. Successes obtained by bloodshed are always uncertain and often ruinous. Besides, the reformers did not turn out to be quite the virtuous people they professed to be, and their moral philosophy was more of the theoretical than the practical kind, while ambition, the fault for which Cæsar suffered murder, was, after all, the great instigator of their crime. Cassius the virtuous wanted to be Cassius the Dictator, and the liberators of Rome were on their way to become her tyrants.

"Lucilius," said Brutus, addressing the man before him, "you are the man to whom I can open my heart and reveal its secrets. Ever since the Ides of March I have had no peace with myself. We have committed a great error, which cannot be rectified; and the conduct of my brother towards me only confirmed this belief, and added to the mortification of my conscience."

"We acted according to the dictates of patriotism," answered Lucilius, trying to allay the mental suffering of his friend.

Brutus had learnt too much since the murder of Cæsar to believe in that hollow word, and the conduct of his co-murderers was anything but patriotic.

"Since I sent you last to my brother Cassius," continued Brutus, taking little heed of his friend's remark, "I am all the more confirmed in my belief, and all the more grieved at my ingratitude. Cassius's messenger has just been announcing his arrival, and, in a short time, we shall have the honour of welcoming him in our tent. We have one or two things to clear," added Brutus, with a significant shake of the head.

Brutus leaned back in his chair as he uttered these words, and covered his eyes with his hands. This was, perhaps, the saddest day in his life. Silent grief was gnawing into his heart, and the world looked dull and meaningless to him, even more than it looked on the Ides of March; and no wonder, for on the morning of that day he received the harrowing news that the partner of his life was no more.

"Poor Portia!" stammered Brutus to himself, in a manner half audible to the friend seated before him, "poor Portia! how she loved me! It was her love that sustained me all through, but now—O, my gods!" cried the poor man, his eyes wet with tears, "now I care to live no more."

It is these awful experiences that level all human nature, the great and the small, the rich and the poor, the philosopher and the simpleton. It is when the cruel and ruthless hand of Nemesis snaps the most vital string that binds us to our existence that we feel the weakness of our human nature. It is when those who are nearest and dearest to our hearts are carried away from among us that we comprehend the hollowness of life, and, more than that, the hollowness of vanity.

Brutus leant his arm on his seat, and his head in the palm of his right hand, and looked far into the distance. The leafless trees on the hills, and the arid plain that extended itself before his tent, appeared void of all traces of life, and their dull look did not relieve the cheerless face of the bereaved man.

Lucilius looked into the face of his friend, and wondered at the depth of his grief. He knew not what had shattered the happiness of Brutus, as the latter kept the news secret to himself.

"We ought not to grieve when we strike in the name of virtue," remarked Lucilius, moralising.

"The blow ought never to have been struck at all, Lucilius. The conduct of my brother, and the rest of the party, exasperated me. I would give my right hand to undo what I did, if that were possible. Cassius shall have a piece of my mind to-day."

In the far distance a cloud of dust announced the approach of the expected General. The cavalcade was seen at last, dashing along at full speed, and, in a short period, Longinus Cassius was in the tent of Brutus. None of the officers entered, and Lucilius, not willing to play the part of the intruder, left the two brothers to their own conversation.

As soon as the brothers were left alone, seated on wooden chairs with a table between them, they looked into each other's face. That of Cassius was flushed, and covered with dust and perspiration; that of Brutus was thin and pale. For the first time in their lives after the memorable Ides of March their eyes met. Those of Cassius were restless with greed and ambition, those of Brutus were fixed and sad with remorse.

For a short time the two Generals simply looked at each other speechless. The silence weighed heavily on both of them. During the space of time which intervened between that fatal day of March and this interview, Brutus had already discovered that Cassius was not, after all, the virtuous and patriotic man he pretended to be. Greed, corruption, and lawlessness were the prominent features of his character the moment he was free to take his own way. Cassius, on his part, had also discovered by this time that Brutus was not the ladder upon which he was to climb to the Dictatorship, but that, unlike other ladders, he strongly objected to be stepped upon.

"The treachery of the tyrants kept us separated," began Cassius, in a gentle tone, "but once more we meet again to concert measures against their tyranny, and it gives me pleasure to find you in good health and condition, my dear brother."

"It is the duty of the host to welcome the guest," answered Brutus coldly.

Cassius affected not to have noticed his brother's coldness, and went on with his speech.

"You have undoubtedly received my letter and learnt all my grievances. But in the common cause of Rome I am quite willing to forget my injuries and serve the State. I have

suffered a great deal in the past for the sake of the Capitol. I am ready to suffer more. I have sacrificed a great deal in the cause of liberty. What matters one sacrifice more?"

"It is like his old hypocrisy," thought Brutus, as the false patriot ended his speech.

"I am sorry," replied Brutus, with his eyes fixed on the man. "I am sorry you have hit on the subject which I was anxious to avoid, and that for your sake. My advice to you is to speak of grievances as little as possible, and as to sacrifices in the cause of liberty never to repeat that word again."

"Good gracious!" cried out Cassius, with wonder. "Is it Brutus that speaks thus to his brother Cassius?"

"Aye, brother, aye! It is not Marcus Brutus the stupid, as his name signifies, that speaks to you, but Junius the wise. It is not the simpleton of the Ides of March, but the experienced made wise by false friends. Not the toy of Longinus Cassius, but the individual who stands on his own feet, and, if necessary, strikes with his own sword."

"Does your anger carry you so far as to forget yourself? If so, please remember to whom you are talking. Was Brutus only a toy in his brother's hands when he raised his voice in the cause of freedom and struck in the cause of liberty. If so, Brutus the honourable is no more than Brutus the ignoble."

"It was in the cause of treachery and tyranny that I unconsciously lent my name and arm. It was because I put too much confidence in the assurances and honour of men that are devoid of honour that I slew my benefactor for the sake of his enemies, to satisfy their greed and help their infamous ambitions. Ever since that fatal day I grieved for the murder

of my friend, and if some things were revealed in time the deed would have never been done. But even then there was this consolation left me, that, although I betrayed my friend, I delivered my country. But time reveals all—all—even the treachery and perfidy of Longinus Cassius!"

"Heaven forgive my patience!" answered Cassius beside himself with rage. "You wrong me, and call yourself wronged? You, who disregarded my letters, punished my friends, slighted my honour, and now insult me to my very eyes, and call my virtues treachery and my honesty perfidy! By all the gods of Rome, if you weren't Brutus my sword would have been quicker than my tongue!"

"You again talk of virtue and honesty, you traitor and villain! You plunged your dagger into the noblest man of Rome to avenge justice, and yet you rob the Roman provinces which were pestered with your presence? You spilt Cæsar's blood on account of his ambition, and yet you concert measures and intrigue to be made a Dictator in the place of the man you removed? You have already bribed your friends with imaginary titles and offices which they are to receive when you are elected a King? A King! The crown did not become the noble countenance of Cæsar, but it is most comely on the brow of Cassius! The victories and magnanimity of Julius Cæsar are not enough to make him a great man in the eyes of his compatriots, but the treachery of a man full of self-conceit, does entitle him to it! I would rather kneel before the seat of Julius Cæsar than sit on a throne with Longinus Cassius. If Cæsar was ambitious, he was truly Royal and magnanimous. There was about him the grandeur and awe inseparable from a great man. If he sat on a throne he brought with him provinces and nations to bow their heads

before Rome, and gold to fill her empty treasury. He fed the hungry, rescued the oppressed, and debased the haughty. If he had sat on a Roman throne there would have been a man whose name would have thrown terror into the uttermost parts of the world. But what claims have you, little man, to bring with you? Look and see the result of thy doing! You have ruined thousands and thousands of men! You have doomed thousands and thousands to destruction! Rome is now hell on earth; fire, blood, and sword are raging in its streets. Confusion and corruption have taken the place of order, and tyranny the place of authority. Is this the golden age you promised me on the night of the Ides of March? Have I spilt the blood of my benefactor for the sake of your ambitions, virtuous Cassius? Fie! Traitor and deceiver. I spurn and despise you! I hate your hypocrisy, and loath your meanness. You, who made of me a coward and a traitor."

"By Jupiter, you presume too much upon my love and patience. I scorn to answer your charges, Marcus Brutus, and as to the present state of Rome, it is yourself you have to thank. If you had consented to dispatch Antony with Cæsar things would have been different, and Cassius, instead of being insulted in his brother's tent, might have been——"

"Might have been a King in Rome," answered Brutus, not giving Cassius time to finish. "Or at least a Dictator in the Capitol, sweeping to his office in the Senate as did Cæsar in the days of his glory; for Cassius, little and insignificant as he is, has the impudence to look upon himself as another Cæsar. But even Cassius will not be spared where Cæsar bled."

"Exasperate me no more, rash man. I have a slow tongue, but a quick hand ; have a care of your life !"

"Has Brutus slain Cæsar to be frightened by Cassius? No, by Jupiter, no ! Every day my heart bleeds for the wrong I did. Every day I grieve over my ingratitude. Like a man deserted both by the gods and men, I feel the terror of my crime. The sense of patriotism sustained my strength, and soothed the voice of my conscience. But now that the noble blood was shed in the cause of Cassius's ambition and his vices, I feel a perfect coward, for the reflection that solaced my pains is gone, and nothing is left but the sting of conscience which makes a hell of my life. Oh, Julius Cæsar ! Julius Cæsar ! I would willingly give up my life if I could only bring you back to life, but as it is impossible, I can only scorn the villain who tempted me to the wicked deed, and look upon him with loathing and contempt."

"Hold your tongue, man, or, by Jupiter, I cannot stay my hand from my sword."

"If you were a man you would have drawn it long ago. I should like immensely to see you carry out your threat."

"Guard yourself, then !"

Immediately the two Generals were on their feet with their weapons drawn in hand ; but no sooner were they in that attitude than Lucilius and Titinius rushed breathlessly into the tent and threw themselves between the two brothers.

"For shame ! Generals," exclaimed Lucilius, his face flushed with agitation at the unexpected sight. "Has it come to that, gentlemen ?"

"Nothing could have pleased Antony and Octavius better," rejoined Titinius. "It is a sight which delights their hearts. Go on, gentlemen, draw your blood with your own hands.

Why wait you for the enemy to do it? Quarrel and fight while cunning Antony and sly Octavius gather arms and drill men for the day of battle. You stop fighting? You sheath your swords? That's more like the noble brothers."

Stung with shame, the two brothers ceased fighting. Their faces showed traces of their confusion. As they stood facing each other, Brutus's face blushed all the more. It was in his tent that this scene had taken place; Cassius was his guest, and moreover his brother. He felt angry with Cassius for being the instigator of Cæsar's death. But Cæsar was no more, and grief mends no mischief. Rome was in a deplorable condition; but that was a good reason why he and Cassius should be united now.

Brutus's fury and excitement gave way to despairing and resignation. With his arms crossed he cast his eyes on the ground. His dearest friend in the world lay cold in the grave murdered by his own hand; his dearest relative, his beloved Portia, was also gone. Rome was in a terrible state of anarchy; people were murdered right and left. The venerable old Cicero was not spared. He had to pay with his head for the eloquence of his tongue. Brutus sighed for the days of Cæsar, but neither Cæsar nor his days could return. Instead of Cæsar there was Cassius before him; the man who, next to Cæsar, was once the dearest to Brutus. But he had found out that Cassius had played him a false part. Selfish and greedy, the latter was absolutely indifferent to the welfare of Rome except when his ambition or greed was interested in the matter. He had denied Brutus a supply of money while gold was being amassed in his treasury through oppression and tyranny. He aimed at being a Dictator, and even hinted at the Royal crown and Royal sceptre. As to the

rest of the murderers the less said about them the better.

Poor, poor Brutus! Have you realized at last the folly of your crime?

It was surely now a choice of evil for Brutus. Either to leave Rome to the mercy of Antony and his ally, or ally himself with his false brother. Out of the two the latter was surely the wiser. It was an evil, but it was a *necessary* evil.

"Cassius," said Brutus, after a long silence. "Cassius, I have acted as befits the friend of Cæsar, but not as the friend of Rome. For her sake we must forget our differences. Your faults and errors are great and many; but I have acted ungentlemanly in receiving you thus in my tent. I forgive and forget your faults—forget mine."

A smile of satisfaction displayed itself on Cassius's face as he embraced his brother. Brutus's back has not yet lost its ladder properties.

CHAPTER L.

AT PHILIPPI.

ON one of the most prominent hills in the neighbourhood of Philippi, stood Cassius in a thoughtful mood. The sun had just risen on the horizon casting its beautiful rays on the adjacent hills and trees.

All was serene. There was nothing to disturb the quiet of nature—nothing except that troublesome, turbulent fool called *man*.

The gentleman on the prominent hill looked round with a military air and cast anxious eyes on the plains below. The dazzling light reflected from the bright arms of the soldiers, did not seem to be very pleasing to his sight. On the contrary, he sourly puckered his face in a way that made it more hideous. A kind of premonition forced itself upon him, and he tried in vain to retain his courage. Within him rose the fear which rises up in all cowardly bosoms. He had committed the greatest crime of his age. It was through his instigation that Julius Cæsar was murdered. There was nothing behind this hideous crime to atone for its atrocity. Of patriotism he had very little, and as to the freedom and liberty of Rome he did not care a straw. He dealt the fatal blow for his own selfish designs. But instead of finding himself with the sceptre of Rome in his hand, he awoke from his foolish dream to become a vagabond and a wanderer. But such was his

mean spirit that even now he tried to avail himself of the kindness and generosity of the man he treacherously despatched to his grave. Cæsar had already issued orders appointing Cassius to the Governorship of Syria, and when the traitor found that the mob was infuriated at his and his colleagues' crime, he could do no better than hasten to the province which the generosity of Cæsar had assigned to him. Having spent there a couple of years in amassing riches through tyranny and oppression, and having succeeded in making himself as hateful and repugnant to the inhabitants as it was possible to do, he now hastened towards his native land to reform Rome and the Roman world, and mend with his pure virtues the tyrannical rules of the man he murdered.

Below him, down in the plains were the two men who were trying to avenge Cæsar's death and defend his memory. The blood of a departed friend and benefactor was crying to heaven for justice and vengeance. The name of the great departed man was still, even then, a great stimulus to their efforts.

The soldiers on the plain were in military movement. As their ranks formed in array of battle, Cassius looked down and tried to laugh away the danger that stared him in the face.

"By to-morrow evening," muttered he to himself, "all these soldiers yonder will be mine. It is not every General who can foresee the future steps of battles and regulate his movements accordingly. Herein lies the difference between an ordinary General and the genius. The success of Julius Cæsar was all the effect of chance. My achievements will be the work of genius; the name of Longinus Cassius must eclipse that of Cæsar. History must decide between us which is the greater. That bear of an Antony will have a severe lesson by to-morrow. A brute like that to govern the Mistress of the world! It is a

wonder how Rome can exist in my absence. This is why things are going wrong. But she will soon value the importance of the future Dictator. And who knows?" chuckled to himself the important man, "the crown that was fatal to Julius Cæsar might after all be wholesome to Longinus Cassius. Brutus has been brought round at last. His back will once more serve me as a beautiful ladder from Dictatorship to Kingship. Rome needs an Emperor, but the crown better befits the genius of Cassius than the boldness of Cæsar. The nation cannot afford to present a man with a crown for the sake of beautifying himself, but she will surely do it to have the talents of a genius. Halloo! Brutus!" said he looking round, as the latter advanced forward with a soft step and sad brow.

"Well," said Brutus, "what do you make out of the position and strength of the enemy?"

"I make out," answered great Cassius, with the air of a perfect Dictator. "I make out that the bear will fall into the clutch of the lions by to-morrow."

"Are you quite sure, Cassius?"

"Sure? What is the use of being a genius if one does not predict the effects from their causes? See you these tents and men yonder? Well, the sun of to-morrow will not set until they are all our property—property, sir."

"I care little whether the property falls into our hands before or after sunset provided it does at last fall."

"I could almost see now the fate of the enemy as they run before us like chaff before the wind. What a blessing that it is evening now! I should almost die of impatience if it was morning. It is only twelve hours before we engage the enemy, and a few hours to complete the victory. It is possible," added

he with a knowing look, "it is possible that all may be over with them before noon-time."

"You speak with too much confidence, Cassius. I am afraid the bear will upset our arrangements now as he did on the Ides of March." A grim smile spread over the face of Brutus.

"There is no fear of that, Brutus. On the Ides of March we had no army to support our views and transact our plans. But now it is quite different. With these brave soldiers over there," continued Cassius, pointing with his index finger towards the adjacent hills, where his and Brutus's soldiers were encamped, "with these brave soldiers we can conquer the world."

Brutus listened, but as he gazed into the distance his face turned pale, his eyes grew dim, his arms fell at his sides. He gasped for breath, while his limbs trembled like shaking leaves. The cold perspiration gathered in large drops upon his forehead.

"There he comes!" he gasped out, his eyes rolling wildly, as he staggered and fell into the arms of his astonished brother.

"Who comes?" asked Cassius quite confused and bewildered.

"He, *he*!" answered Brutus.

"Who is *he*?"

"He, *the man of the Ides of March*!"

CHAPTER LI.

BETWIXT THE CUP AND THE LIP.

THE sun of the next day cast his dying rays on the mountains and hills of Philippi. The face of the sky was all tinged with crimson, and so were the plains of Philippi with the blood that had been shed on their soil that day.

In every direction soldiers ran in frantic rage or despair. Thousands pursuing, thousands pursued. But on every spot where human feet trod, human blood was shed.

All was lost with the Cæsarian party. The philosophy which young Octavius picked up in Greece, did not seem to have been of much use to him on the plains of Philippi. Philosophy and war do not often go very well together. The reflections of a man sitting at his desk differ greatly from those which cross the mind in the din of battle. But Octavius's philosophy was not altogether without its reward. In Greece he learnt, at least, one thing: that discretion is the best part of valour; and as this world is the field where our philosophical rules are practised, he not only acted, but greatly improved on the principle. If discretion was the best part of valour certainly flight was the best part of discretion!

It was long after dusk that Brutus, covered with blood and dust, returned to his tent. The air of victory seemed to have banished away all his previous dulness and melancholy. With success grief passes off, and hope brightens the face, and gladdens the heart. All his previous remorse had vanished, and nothing was left on that pale face but the glow of happiness, which conquest always brings to the victor.

The hours of the night passed sweetly, but there was no word from Cassius.

"Clitus," said Brutus to his slave, "touch the strings of your harp. For two long years my ears could not bear the sound of music; touch it with all your skill, and let the happy day be followed by a happy night."

Sweetly and melodiously the music sounded in the stillness of the night. The voice of the musician rose to its highest pitch, as he sang the old familiar songs of Rome.

But neither the vibrations of the harp nor the sweet voice of the singer could bring the long expected brother of Brutus. Neither Cassius, nor a word from Cassius came, and as the vibration of the music and voice died away, the stillness of the night became impressive.

"He is busy with his own victory," thought Brutus to himself. "Conquest makes people forget themselves; no wonder if they forget their friends. He must be fatigued and tired after the achievements of the day. But no matter, to-morrow we shall meet once more—sing once more, Clitus," said he, addressing his servant. "This awful silence weighs upon my weary limbs like an evil spell. Conquerors or conquered, music is the heavenly balsam which heals our wounds and alleviates our misery."

Once more the strings quivered under the experienced touch of the singer, and once more his voice rang melodiously in the ears of his master, whose face became now a little more composed.

Suddenly the music was broken by the appearance of Brutus's servant, who, pale and trembling, announced the arrival of an officer.

"Is he coming on the part of those traitors to sue for

pardon? Mercy I give none. Both Antony and Octavius must pay with their heads for the faults of their tongues, and the deeds of their hands."

"He is the aide-de-camp of your noble brother," replied the servant, with an audible sigh.

"What! the aide-de-camp of Cassius is here?"

"Yes, my lord," answered the servant, with a grief not noticed by Brutus.

"And Cassius himself?"

"Cassius himself is not here."

"This is always the case when people are in prosperity; they are apt to forget their friends; even their dearest friends. Halloa Messala," cried Brutus, boisterously, as the latter entered the tent. "Success always spoils people, my dear friend; I am tired of waiting."

Messala stood before Brutus, and sadly looked into his face.

"Cheerful news, isn't it? We have given a good lesson to those traitors. The bear will repent now having adhered to Cæsar's cause. The simpleton! He preferred the cause of one dead man to that of many living noblemen. Let the dead rescue him now."

How strange and fickle a thing is human nature! Only the other day he reproached Cassius for having instigated the murder of his benefactor, and it was only yesterday that he looked pale and ghastly as the man of the Ides of March stood before him on the hill. But now he is a victorious man! He could already see the Senate meeting him at the gate of the Immortal City, with wreaths of flowers in their hands, and smiles of welcome on their faces, just as they did the victor of Pharsalia. They would welcome him, and proclaim him Consul, and fawn upon him, and flatter him just as they did the

ambitious man who lay in his grave. Flattery is a very ugly thing in others, but when people flatter us it is all right, and we have the self-conceit to call it honest truth. To the weakness of flattery we add the fault of untruth. Before the Ides of March there was only one Dictator in Rome. After the Ides of March there were sixty candidates for the ambitious office, and every one of them had his hands stained with the blood of the only man who was qualified to be really useful to the State.

"Sit down, Messala," rejoined Brutus, with that affable air of condescension with which a superior man speaks kindly to his inferior, "sit down and let rank and etiquette stand aside. What good news do you bring with you, old man?"

The man was speechless, but the tears which sprang up into his eyes spoke for him.

"Good heavens!" cried Brutus, his eyes dilated with vague fears. "Have you met with any misfortune?"

Drop by drop the tears of the officer fell upon the ground as he stood dumb before the brother of his General.

"Grief amends no evil, man; better speak like a man than cry like a child."

"We sustained a bad defeat by the enemy," stammered out Messala at last, with a trembling voice.

"What say you, Antony defeated Cassius? Impossible!"

"Alas! that which seemed impossible in the morning was but too possible in the evening."

This piece of news was a great shock to Brutus's vanity after having been only a moment before elated with success.

"Cassius was right," he thought, "in reproving me to allow that traitor of an Antony to deliver an oration on Cæsar's body. Whoever thought that the clumsy man could deliver a

heart-stirring oration at that solemn occasion? The bear developed into a good speaker, and the good speaker is developing now into a good general. He is becoming quite a nuisance, that clumsy bear; but no matter, we will soon doctor him."

"Well," said Brutus, turning towards the officer with a dignified air of indifference. "What can't be helped can't be helped. But with all that, we are no worse to-day than we were yesterday; Cassius defeated by Antony, Octavius by Brutus. To-morrow must decide the fate of battle, and the fate of Rome hangs on a single throw. Bid Cassius be of good cheer. Return to him at once and tell him I am impatiently waiting for him. If he is too tired to come to me I shall go over to him."

Once more the eyes of the officer were cast down upon the ground, and a faint sob was heard to escape from his breast.

"Hear you what I bid you?" asked Brutus with harshness in his voice. "Beg him to come here, if possible, and the sooner the better."

"Cassius is dead!!" faltered out at last the unfortunate officer.

"Dead!"

"Dead, and only a few moments ago."

"Fell he in the battlefield?" asked Brutus, his face aghast.

"I kept by his side till late in the day. The issue of the battle being doubtful, Cassius mounted a small hill, and there, with anxious looks, watched the movements of the armies. Now and then he brought his hand to his forehead in deep reflection. The fortunes of the battle were on our side. Antony's army was thrown into confusion and disorder, and our soldiers pressed upon them with much enthusiasm. I

turned to Cassius and congratulated him on the successful issue, when I noticed that his brow was much troubled, and a stern look rested where a smile ought to have been."

" ' Does it grieve my lord to see our regiments gaining the day ? ' asked I half in earnest, half in joke."

" He answered not, but with a gesture, pointed his index finger towards a spot quite close to us, and there for the first time I noticed the presence of a man attired in Roman military uniform. His stature was lofty, and on his brow rested a sad smile, but his eyes glared at us like two fiery balls. His face had a look of defiance, and in his right hand was his sword drawn and brilliant."

" How or whence this man came I could not guess, and at his sight I felt a tremor run through my body."

" ' Think you your regiments will gain the day ? ' said the stranger with a mocking smile. ' Think you your wickedness and crime are to triumph at last over justice ? Not at all, not at all. Your success is only momentary. Wait only a minute and your illusion will pass away. I shall fly yonder to the rescue of my troops. I have often delivered them out of more difficult straits. I shall deliver them out of this. Before this bright sun yonder', continued the stranger with his hand towards the setting orb, ' before yonder sun sets behind those hills you are a dead man, Longinus Cassius. To-day it is your turn ; to-morrow another's ; ' " and so saying, the man disappeared from our sight as if by magic.

Brutus's face turned alternately pale and red—a rigor shook his frame.

" Who was the stranger ? " he asked, feigning ignorance.

" Who was the stranger ! " reiterated Messala, his eyes wide open with astonishment. " I thought that the figure

could have corresponded only to one man," answered the officer with his eyes cast on the ground.

"Well?"

"Well," continued Messala, "it was as the figure predicted." Half-an-hour later the fire was seen in our tents with the flame high up into the sky, and our regiments retreating with rapid steps and in great confusion.

"Cassius, who seemed as if petrified after the disappearance of the figure, directed Titinius to gallop over to the scene of flame and confusion, and report on the matter.

"Five minutes later we could see Titinius surrounded by soldiers, dismounted from his horse, and lost in the crowd that encircled him.

"At this sight we gave up all hope. There was not a shadow of doubt in our minds that we were defeated.

"I left my master for a minute to ascertain the state of affairs from another point on the hill. What was my joy when I discovered that Titinius, instead of being taken, was only hurrying back again, waving his hand high up into the air like one bringing cheerful news.

"I ran back to inform the General, but what was my horror when I saw Cassius lying down on the ground, with his face ghastly pale and a stream of blood spouting out from his side! His sword, all covered with blood, was lying beside him. He was not dead yet, but life was fast ebbing.

"Oh, my lord! my lord!" cried I, as I stood beside his bleeding body.

"He took no notice of my lamentation, but with a supreme effort he raised his hand and pointed towards the spot where the stranger stood but a while ago.

“ ‘There he is back again!’ feebly murmured Cassius in my ear.

“ ‘Who is back, my lord?’ I asked, seeing nobody on the spot.

“ ‘Don’t you see him, man? Brutus was right yesterday. *It is the man of the Ides of March!*’ and, with his eyes still fixed on the imaginary figure, Cassius breathed his last.”

Brutus spoke no more, but, with his arms crossed over his chest, and his eyes sadly cast down upon the ground, he gave way to sadness and despair.

History calls Cassius the last of the Romans! It is only another proof that she has not yet lost her art of flattery. The last of the Romans had long since been despatched to his grave by thy kindly dagger, O, thou patriotic, treacherous murderer!

CHAPTER LII.

THE STAGE CURTAIN DROPS.

ONCE more the sun rose in the beautiful blue sky to witness the folly and brutality of mankind, and once more another page was added to the strange history of the world, written, as usual, with letters of blood.

As the day waned a small party of horsemen were hurrying from the plains of Philippi, now all covered with the dead and dying. The quick steps of the little cavalcade were ominous. It was not the hurry of the victor. It looked more like the flight of the conquered.

The sad expression on their faces, their general dejection in gait, and their hurry, left no doubt that fortune had placed her wreaths on the brows of their enemies.

First and foremost among the little cavalcade rode the man who seemed to be the principal one of the party. His face was contracted in a painful manner. Adversity had wrought on it her work of misery and wretchedness. His eyes looked far into the distance with a strange meaningless look, and over that pale shrunken features of the poor man despair—mortifying despair—was hovering like a ghastly spectre!

Silent and gloomy, the small body of horsemen fled away from the fatal field of Philippi. A sigh now and then was heard from the lips of their leader, which soon died away, and then nothing was heard but the sound of the horses' hoofs, dull and sad, on the soft plain.

At last the party arrived at a solitary spot. A flat piece of solid rock stood in the centre, surrounded by a few patches of green grass and wild flowers. The leader of the party nimbly alighted from his horse, and, looking towards the piece of rock, nodded his head with a sign of approval as he directed his hurried steps towards it.

Seated on the rock with his followers round him, the leader threw an anxious look around. Then, seeing no sign of anybody, he directed his eyes towards the sky in pathetic melancholy.

The sun was hastening to close the day. He threw a bright crimson colour around him. The blood-red hue spread everywhere. The man placed his head between his two hands, and pressed them against his temples as if in the act of allaying mental distress. He was in one of those terrible moments when men are convinced that they have done an irreparable wrong by committing a crime to do good which has brought untold suffering and misery. Marcus Brutus had now plainly discovered his error, when it was too late to mend it. His figure, turned towards the west, looked like a statue of despair set in bronze. The blood-red sun, behind a transparent cloud, looked like an angry god mocking the folly of the mortal before him.

Oh, how mortifying and heartrending are these terrible moments when the tide of adversity swells against us, and the hand of Fate, long lifted up threateningly, deals at last the fatal blow which shatters our happiness and annihilates our aspirations!

As Brutus looked vaguely on towards space, the hand of fate seemed to have written on the hard lines of his forehead the cruel word "*despair*." Hope, the stimulus which

sustains us in the time of adversity, had disappeared from the mind of the unfortunate man. His existence since that fatal day of the Ides of March had been a burden to him. He had already discovered that he acted in a manner unbecoming a man of honour; that he had dealt treacherously towards the man to whom he owed life and position in society. He had seen but too clearly that his fellow-conspirators were no more than thieves and robbers clothed with the garment of patriotism which was thin enough to betray their real nature. Of all the great murderers, he was the only dupe. He was such a fool as to believe that the moment Cæsar was dead the golden age of Rome would arrive. Instead of the expected golden age, the reign of terror ruled where order and justice reigned before. Every one of the cowardly conspirators ran for safety or spoil. Yet he still hoped that, if fortune favoured him, things might yet be mended. He was rudely awakened from his idle dream on the plain of Philippi.

After the first gush of our impotent rage and fury comes the calm quiet of resignation. Turning towards the face of the setting sun, the unhappy man shook his head sadly. "We shall go down together," he apostrophized, "you in your blood, and I in mine."

Gradually the sun began to disappear behind the sombre hills, and the colour of the sky got redder and redder. The wretched man was still looking at the west.

"You sink in your own red mantle, and I in mine," repeated he, his eyes bewildered with the crimson glare.

But, O heaven! what was this ghastly shadow that suddenly stood between him and the red light? Was it the effect of the

strange atmospheric phenomenon, or was it the illusion of his sense? Or was it, after all, a reality?

Out of space there rose a shadowy form, the shadow developing into a human being, and the human being in his turn shaped itself into a distinct individual. With a dazzling uniform, beautifully decorated, fringed with gold and silver, stood the well familiar commanding figure of Julius Cæsar! His noble forehead shone with strange light, and his large black eyes gazed steadily on the trembling figure before it. By his side hung his long favourite sword, inlaid with precious stones, and fringes of gold tassels hanging down its handle. The expression of the face was the same, its grandeur of the countenance had not changed. There were no wounds on his body as on the Ides of March or the night of Sardis. The crimson glow of the sky tinged the purple colour of the uniform.

The unhappy Brutus found his eyes fixed on the General standing before him. Cæsar gave him a strange look, a mixture of pity, contempt, and sympathy. He spoke not a word, but, pointing with his finger to the spot where Brutus's dagger had pierced his body, the figure seemed to soar lightly above the ground, and then, like a vapoury form, suddenly vanished from the eyes of the spectators. At that moment the sun vanished altogether behind the dull hills. A chill was felt by all the little company on the rock.

The trembling man looked again at the west and smiled. "It is my turn now," he murmured to himself.

Approaching his comrades, Brutus whispered into their ears one by one. Every time he whispered a sad shaking of the head indicated a negative answer.

Once more he threw an anxious look towards the road that

led to the fatal plain, and his brow darkened. A party of horsemen were rapidly approaching. Their hilarious voices indicated that they were of the victorious party. There was not a single moment to lose. In this dilemma, the entreaties of the unhappy man prevailed, and one of the party was at last seen to nod with his head in the affirmative. Not long after the sun had vanished with his blood-red garment, the face of the moon, pale and pure, was seen in the eastern horizon, a striking contrast to the previous ruddy colour of the sun. The stars began to twinkle in the firmament, as if disdainfully smiling at the paltry games which took place under their eyes. Not a zephyr stirred.

On the rock, a man, with his face turned up toward the sky, was lying, a lifeless corpse. His eyes, fixed in death, seemed to gaze up into the shining stars, in a strange inquisitive manner, as if soliciting their verdict upon his past career.

Rome respected thy sterling character ; Cæsar loved thee as a tender father ; Cicero applauded thy bloodstained dagger ; posterity dealt charitably with thy treachery ; history was kind to thy memory ; Shakespeare ennobled and immortalized thy crime ; the bitter remorse of thy conscience somewhat atoned for thy guilt ; thy misguided patriotism was sealed with thy blood. May the ashes of thy bones find repose in their cold grave !

THE END.

